



OUR BEST SOCIETY

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00020249444

CANNOT LEAVE THE LIBRARY.

CHAP. P 23

SHELF B 280

Copy 2

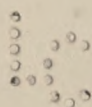
COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

9-165

OUR BEST SOCIETY

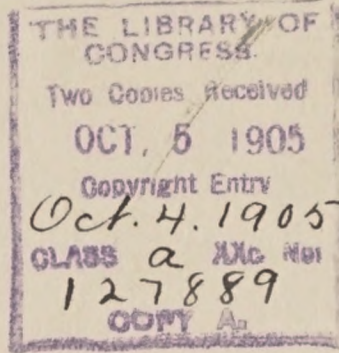
John D. Barry.
"



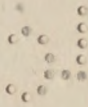
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press
1905

Copy 2.

PZ3
B280
copy 2



COPYRIGHT, 1905
BY
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS



The Knickerbocker Press, New York

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—OUR DOMESTIC PEACE IS BROKEN	I
II.—ON THE BRINK OF SOCIETY	II
III.—WE DINE WITH THE VAN ZANDTS	21
IV.—WE ATTEND LILY VALENTINE'S FIRST NIGHT	41
V.—I MEET THE GREAT DRAMATIST	62
VI.—THE DIFFICULTIES OF BEING A HERO	73
VII.—THE SCENARIO IS WRITTEN	87
VIII.—WE MEET MISS VALENTINE'S MANAGER	113
IX.—WALTER HART ENTERTAINS US	135
X.—AN OUTING IN THE COUNTRY	157
XI.—TEDDY MARKOE MAKES AN APPEAL	169
XII.—OUR RETURN TO NEW YORK	188
XIII.—A GLIMPSE OF LETTY'S HOME LIFE	200
XIV.—MISS VALENTINE BECOMES BUSINESS- LIKE	215
XV.—WE ATTEND THE HORSE SHOW	228
XVI.—TEDDY PLAYS THE HOST	243

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVII.—A LIVELY HOUSE PARTY . . .	254
XVIII.—AN EARLY MATINÉE . . .	265
XIX.—THE MORNING AFTER . . .	280
XX.—MRS. HENDERSON MEETS THE SITU- ATION	290
XXI.—TEDDY MAKES ANOTHER APPEAL .	301
XXII.—MONTY GROWS REMINISCENT .	306
XXIII.—OUR PLAY MARCHES . . .	312
XXIV.—AN UNCONVENTIONAL MEETING .	321
XXV.—WE FINISH OUR TASK . . .	330
XXVI.—LILY VALENTINE HAS TROUBLES .	337
XXVII.—SOME FIRST-NIGHT AGITATIONS .	347
XXVIII.—A FEW SOLUTIONS . . .	357

OUR BEST SOCIETY



OUR BEST SOCIETY

CHAPTER I

OUR DOMESTIC PEACE IS BROKEN

Alice looked up from the typewriter where she was copying my story. "It does seem like a good chance, does n't it?" she said.

"What?" I asked, turning from the page I had been correcting with my pen. Alice has a curious habit of blurting out things.

"Mrs. Van Zandt's invitation, of course."

"I had forgotten it." I returned to my revising. I enjoy revising my work when it has been typewritten: it almost seems as if it had been done by some one else.

By my tone I had tried to convey that the subject was closed; but Alice frequently ignores those little messages.

"Your experience thus far has been limited," she went on, pretending to pore over my manuscript.

"How?" I asked.

Our Best Society

"Socially," she replied with patient conciseness. "The Van Zandts know everybody."

"Then they must waste a lot of time," I retorted.

"Everybody worth knowing." Now you can't keep on writing about literary people. They are not especially interesting anyway—in books."

I put down my pen. "What is it you are driving at?"

"I am trying to make you see that we ought to go to the Van Zandts' dinner-party."

Alice turned to the machine. For several minutes I listened to the rapid clicking of the keys. Alice and I never quarrel; but occasionally we do have subtle jars. They seem to me one of the most terrible refinements of civilisation.

At last I exclaimed: "Now don't be silly."

Alice stopped writing at once. She looked at me with astonishment in her face. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"I see that you want to go to that dinner. I don't want to go. But if you insist, I will go," I conceded.

Alice started to turn back to the typewriter; but she checked herself. "I really don't care about it at all, Edward. But I've been thinking lately that the life we lead here is very limited."

"It suits me all right," I replied, folding my hands behind my head.

"It's pleasant enough; but it does n't give you any material."

"I hate this continual looking for material. If I did it all the time, I'd never get any rest. Thank Heaven, I'm not one of those fellows that carry their

work round in their heads. I should think they 'd go mad."

"With a good many of them it's a pose," Alice acknowledged.

Suddenly it occurred to me to ask: "Are n't you satisfied with this little apartment?"

"You know I love it!" Alice indignantly exclaimed.

"So do I. And I love it all the more because it's in the slums."

"But it is n't in the slums, Edward."

"It's so near there's not much difference."

"We are just around the corner from Second Avenue, and some very nice people live there."

"Why should we care whether we live near nice people or not? The people that we like come here to see us. If they did n't like us, too, they would n't take the trouble to travel 'way down to Twelfth Street."

"The Van Zandts live downtown, you know," Alice went on, "in Washington Square. It would be convenient for us to go."

"Carriage?" I asked almost in a whisper.

"No!" Alice exclaimed.

"Walk?"

"Certainly,—er—that is, if you like."

The moment of hesitancy alarmed me. "But it would be such a bore. I could n't do any work the next morning."

Alice rested her hands on the table, the fingers wide apart. She stared at them for a long time. "Have you ever read the *Potiphar Papers*, Edward?"

"By George William Curtis? Of course I have."

"Do you know what I think would be fine?" Alice drew her fingers together and separated them again.

"What?"

"To do something like what he did in those papers." She looked up into my face and smiled. "You look a little like Curtis as he was at your age."

I turned away impatiently.

"You do really. Have n't you ever seen his picture as a young man? He used to let his hair fall over his forehead just as yours does."

I resisted the impulse to brush back my hair.

"He was poor like you, too."

I leaned forward and, before Alice realised what I was going to do, I gave her a kiss. "Poor!" I exclaimed.

Then Alice drew her chair nearer.

"It really is a splendid chance. Why, there are plenty of people here in New York who would crawl to Washington Square on their hands and knees to attend one of Mrs. Van Zandt's dinner-parties. And to think that they should come 'way down here to call on us!"

"They did it just because Mrs. Van Zandt took a fancy to you."

Alice shook her head.

"Why, then?"

"Because I am married to you—because you are a personage now, Ned."

"You know perfectly well that she was nice to you at Narragansett, before you married me. She used to take you out driving every day."

"That was because she was bored. I was a fresh interest. But she'd never have found me interesting in New York. It's you she's after, Ned, and we must go."

"But the damage!" I lamented.

"It won't cost anything."

"We'll have to ask them to dine with us."

"They won't come. Besides, they wouldn't expect it."

"Then they are not receiving us on terms of equality. They want to patronise us."

"How foolish you are, Ned! Can't you see they'll feel honoured by your consenting to come?"

"My consenting?" I asked, bewildered.

"The other people will be glad to see you. Of course, they'll all have read your book."

"Why 'of course'?"

"Because, after we accept, Mrs. Van Zandt will let them know you're coming, and they'll all rush off and get the book."

"From the libraries," I grunted.

"Those people don't bother to go to libraries. When they want a thing they never wait for it. They just send some one to buy it. That's the beauty of being acquainted with them. They meet so few authors that they never think of asking for autograph copies."

"Expecting to get them for nothing," I added.

"Really, it's very important that we should go to the Van Zandts'," Alice continued briskly, as if the matter were settled. "We'll meet people who will ask us to their houses, and we'll see something of

the great world. Then you can write about it. So few authors know society as it really is—especially among the younger writers.”

“My dear, you are becoming terribly commercial.”

“One has to be commercial in New York,” Alice replied gayly, “even when one is married to a literary man.”

During the next few moments Alice busied herself with her copying. But I knew that she would speedily return to the discussion. Finally she said: “Of course, all you’d have to do would be to wear your evening clothes.”

“That dear old dress-suit!” I exclaimed.

“It was expensive, was n’t it?”

“Seventy-five dollars, just about twice as much as I could afford. But I suppose the most prudent man is apt to be extravagant when he’s buying a wardrobe before he is married.”

“It looks all right.”

“Except that it’s three years out of style.”

“Styles don’t change in dress-suits. Besides,” Alice went on, inconsistently, “no one would notice what you wore. People never expect literary men to be careful about their clothes.”

“That’s all the more reason why I should wish to be careful. However, if you prefer to have me wear the old suit, I’ll do it.”

“I think you ought to have a new suit, anyway, Ned. Suppose you should be asked to take part in an Authors’ Reading? How awful it would be to stand up in that old thing of yours—especially when all the other young men whose books are having big

sales would be wearing the most extravagant clothes! People would say your books were n't selling."

"But I can't allow myself the luxury of a new dress-suit unless you get something new too," I exclaimed with a feverish haste that made me realize how hard it was to be heroic.

"Oh," Alice replied bravely, "I can fix up one of my old dresses,—one of those I had before I was married."

At this moment I felt a sudden depression, why, I cannot explain. It was followed by a violent revulsion against that dinner-party. "Alice," I said earnestly, "let's write to the Van Zandts that we can't come. It will upset all our quiet little habits. It will get us into a world where we don't really belong. As things are now, we have a world of our own, and it suits us both."

To my astonishment Alice looked me full in the face and replied: "Please don't get into that preaching way, Ned. Of course, I am willing to give up the old dinner-party. But it does seem a pity that you should miss the chance of doing the book."

"Oh, hang the book! Life is more important than literature," I sententiously exclaimed.

"But if you don't go on making literature, I don't see how we can live. So far as we are concerned there's no difference between them."

"Well, it's very kind of you to call what I write literature, my dear girl."

"The only trouble with you, Ned, is that you're too literary. That's what I want you to know the Van Zandts for."

I noticed that there was a quaver in Alice's voice; but it did not prepare me for the scene that followed. With bewilderment I saw her face flush, and her eyes fill with tears. A moment later she had covered her face with her hands and was sobbing violently.

"Oh, my poor Alice!" I exclaimed, and I walked over and put my arms around her. She drew away from me. At last she broke out: "You never do what I want you to do. Here I am, all day long, shut up in this old flat. You work in the morning and I can't speak to you. At luncheon you are so tired that you have n't a word to say. All you can do is *eat*. And then, in the afternoon, you go out to the club or to see editors, and you don't get back till dinner-time."

"But our evenings, Alice," I gasped. "Think how pleasant they are."

"After being shut up in the house all day? You'd better stay at home some time and see how you'll like it then. I must have a little variety in my life. I've always had it—till I was married—and I do get so sick of those literary people who come here and talk about themselves and about the books they have written or the books they're going to write, till one o'clock in the morning! I've actually sat for hours listening to them without saying one word myself."

"That's because you're so sympathetic," I helplessly exclaimed. "It does them a lot of good to talk their ideas over with you. They've told me so themselves. That's what most of them come for."

"But when I'm not in the room they keep at it just the same; and when a lot of them are in your den together it's a perfect struggle among them to see which can talk most about himself. They hate to hear about one another's things."

"Oh, come now, Alice, I don't think you're quite fair."

"You know perfectly well I'm fair. You've often told me I am the fairest-minded woman you've ever known. And I've heard you ridicule literary people for being so egotistical. But when you are among them, you're just as bad as any of them."

"I suppose I am," I humbly acknowledged.

Alice rose with quiet dignity. Her face, a moment before wet with tears, now gave not the slightest indication that she had been crying except that her eyes looked unusually bright and pretty. It is marvellous, the way she can conceal the ravages of grief.

"After all, I think you are right," she said in a low voice. "When a woman marries a literary man, she enjoys privileges that other women can't have. So she ought to be prepared to make sacrifices. I am sorry for what I said. Besides, I only wished to go to the Van Zandts' for your sake. It would be no pleasure for me. But I see now that I was wrong. It would be giving up too much that is essential to your comfort." She walked to the door leading to the hall. "Let us not speak of it again."

These words gave me a fierce desire to prolong the discussion; but somehow I found I could not move from my seat. I felt as if I had been unjustly

convicted of an offence I could not understand. I knew only that it was serious. For a long time I smoked my pipe, glancing from time to time at Alice's empty chair. I was getting a hard punishment, and I could think of no philosophy to soften it. It was accompanied by a consciousness, with which Alice alone had the power to inspire me, of serious trouble to come.

CHAPTER II

ON THE BRINK OF SOCIETY

FOR two days Alice did not mention the Van Zandts' invitation. On the second evening I said to her: "Have you written to those people in Washington Square?"

"Not yet," Alice replied.

"But what will they think of us?"

"You did n't say anything about it." Alice sat at my desk, and, taking the note-paper that she keeps for her special uses, she wrote rapidly. I looked over her shoulder and read:

"MY DEAR MRS. VAN ZANDT:

"It is so kind of you to ask us to dine with you, and we are sorry that we are engaged for the ninth
——"

"Alice!"

"Well?"

"What engagement?"

"The usual one—to stay at home."

"What 's the use of lying about it?"

"Do you call that lying?" she asked, with a smile that convicted me of a long line of offences. She drew from her box another sheet and I watched her with curiosity.

Our Best Society

"MY DEAR MRS. VAN ZANDT:

"It is so kind of you to ask us to dine with you."

Alice looked up. "That is n't quite truthful, either, is it, from your point of view?"

"Well, I'll concede that," I replied, waving my hand, and Alice began to write again.

"But to be perfectly frank, my husband——"

"Now, Alice!" I protested. "You know better than that."

"Than what?" she asked, biting her pen.

"Calling me your husband. It sounds——" I hesitated, and Alice supplied a word—"Common?"

"Well, not exactly. But would n't my name do better?"

Alice drew in her under-lip and took a fresh sheet. "It is expensive knowing the Van Zandts," she commented lightly.

"You might practise on some of my copy-paper," I growled, but Alice paid no attention.

"MY DEAR MRS. VAN ZANDT:

"It is so kind of you to ask us to dine with you."

"Before we get through," I remarked, "Mrs. Van Zandt will be established in our minds as the kindest person in the world."

"But Edward——"

she wrote.

"Now look here!" I said in a loud voice. "It's absurd to call me Edward. She's never seen me."

"They all call one another by their first names."

"Won't 'Mr. Foster' do?"

"It would sound provincial to Mrs. Van Zandt. At Narragansett I once heard her ridicule some woman in the hotel, a 'tradesman's wife,' she called her, for always referring to her husband as Mr. Smith, or whatever his old name was."

"Well, I'm glad we are n't going to have anything to do with people who have such silly prejudices."

"You have a good many yourself—just like them. In your stories you always call your men by their last names. You'd have a fit if you discovered that by some slip you'd called one of them by his first name."

"But I don't want to seem familiar with my characters, or to pet them, or anything like that. I want to be impersonal."

"Well, you are, dear Ned. But that's a prejudice too. Mrs. Van Zandt thinks it's a silly affectation for a woman to call her husband by the name she'd never give him if she were speaking to him."

"I suppose there's something in that," I acknowledged, determined, if possible, to look at the matter in a broad way.

"That is only one of many things you'd learn by going into society. Now, if you were writing a story about rich people here in New York, people like the Van Zandts, you'd make them write and do and say a great many things that they'd positively shudder

at. That's why they think nearly all the society novels are so absurd."

"Write what you please," I remarked, not very pleasantly I'll admit, and Alice continued:

"finds it impossible to go out in the evening and keep on with his literary work."

"Now I can't have that!"

Alice placed another sheet on the blotter. "Very well, you dictate the letter and I'll write it."

"It's absurd, dragging in my business. It's simply brag."

"Dictate and I'll write," Alice commanded.

"My dear Mrs. Van Zandt," I said, trying to keep my temper. The effort produced an explosion. "You and your damned old dinner can go to the devil."

Alice brushed back her hair to indicate how sorely tried a woman she was. "You might be sensible," she remarked with a simulation of divine patience.

"I am willing to go to the dinner," I finally heard myself saying, in a voice utterly unlike my own.

Alice did not reply.

"I will do anything," I exclaimed desperately, "to put an end to this situation."

"Who created it?" Alice asked, without moving.

"I suppose you think I did," I challenged. But Alice was in too heroic a mood to heed.

"I am willing to take all the blame," she said. "I ought to have known better than to aspire to anything outside of our routine."

I sat at the table and seized a sheet of paper. It

was my turn now to be silent. When I had finished writing I tossed the sheet over to Alice, feeling that I had made a masterly stroke.

"That won't do at all," she said wearily.

"Why not?"

"It would be insulting to treat Mrs. Van Zandt in that impersonal way, after she took the trouble to send me a nice note." Alice smiled faintly, and I reached over for the sheet and read aloud:

" 'Mr. and Mrs. Edward Foster accept with pleasure Mrs. Nicholas Van Zandt's kind invitation for dinner on the ninth of this month.' "

I shook my head despairingly. "It sounds to me terribly correct."

"That's the trouble," Alice remarked with easy authority.

"As if we could be too correct with those people!"

"Dear Ned, that shows how simple you are. It also shows that you have n't caught their tone. But, of course, how could you?" she went on laughing.

"I would n't be so superior if I were you, just because I'd rubbed up against people like the Van Zandts for a few weeks at a summer hotel."

Alice, as I at once perceived, felt so secure in her advantage that she would not take offence. In the most cheerful manner she drew another sheet from her box of note-paper and, as she wrote, I looked over her shoulder.

"DEAR MRS. VAN ZANDT:

"Your dear little note must have come just after Edward and I left for the country and we have just

returned to find it waiting for us. It will give us both great pleasure to dine with you on the ninth.

“Sincerely yours,

“ALICE FOSTER.”

“Whew!” I said, and Alice took up an envelope and wrote the address.

“It is much less deceitful to tell a whopper than to twist the truth,” Alice remarked indifferently. “Now,” she went on, “please drop this in the box at once, Edward. It’s dreadful to think that we’ve kept Mrs. Van Zandt waiting so long.”

I walked down the stairs, feeling a strange heaviness of body. I wondered vaguely if men usually knew when they were henpecked. As I was about to drop the letter into the box, it occurred to me that dropping or not dropping the letter might change the whole course of my life. How often had I observed that great issues were directed by the most trifling causes! After going out in the chilly autumn night, however, it seemed easier to drop the letter than not to drop it.

As soon as I returned to the apartment, Alice threw her arms around my neck. “I knew you hated the thought of going and you did it just for me. But we shall get heaps of material—heaps.”

“That’s an awful way of looking at the matter,” I replied, gloomily. “It seems like spying.”

“Then a writer is spying all the time.”

“And I often feel uncomfortable about it.”

“But think of all the good it does. Think of all your books teach. Have n’t you always said that a story was valuable only so far as it gave a criticism

of life and helped people to understand life better and to live better. That's what your books do."

"Oh," I lamented, "I sometimes think it would be better to join the Salvation Army at once!"

"Then you'd never reach the rich," Alice gleefully remarked. "It's just your luck to be one of the few who are able to help the poor millionaires."

"When is the old dinner?" I asked, less for the sake of securing the information than to show that I still felt ugly.

"Just a week from to-night," Alice replied.

I have reason to recall this answer. It stands for a lost week in our life. I wonder if all people have similar periods. I know that all writers do. Every morning when I went to my desk the thought of that dinner-party would keep me for a long time from getting to work. When, finally, I did succeed in making a start, it would be unsatisfactory, and I would tear up what I had written, only to sit in despair and make another futile attempt. Then, too, Alice would do what she had never done before—burst in and interrupt me on every occasion to discuss the same subject, her clothes. On the day after we accepted the invitation she went straight to the dressmaker's. I might as well confess that on the same day I conferred with my tailor. I tried to face the situation heroically; we must do the right thing, no matter what the cost might be. Not for one moment did I lose my temper, and as for Alice, she had the serenity of one whose ways were busy enough to create a sense of importance. It was not until, in an absent-minded way, she asked me if I had

ordered the carriage, that I became really aroused to what we were doing. I was astonished when I heard myself saying, as if some one inside of me had spoken: "Shall we have two horses and an outrider?"

"We 'll have a coupé," said Alice.

"Not a brougham?" I asked, merely to go on being sarcastic.

From that moment until we entered the coupé, there was a coldness between Alice and me. I believe that no one else would have noticed it. In fact, we seemed unusually considerate of each other and affectionate. But, somehow, it was a painful time. I felt relieved when I saw Alice seated beside me as we whirled up the street. Suddenly my hand stole toward hers. In response to my pressure, she gave a quick little squeeze.

"Do you think it 's been worth while?" I asked, and she replied, her eyes filling with tears:

"You have n't said one word about my gown."

"All your gowns seem beautiful to me," I said, and, as I spoke, I realised that I was literary rather than truthful. I occasionally find literature getting into my speech just as in daily life actors impersonate characters they have played.

"I don't believe you 've noticed the gown." Alice kept her eyes fixed on the carriage window. "I just walked around the room, hoping you 'd speak of it. You were so mean that I would n't tell you what I thought of your dress suit."

"That was because I was nervous, dear. I was afraid of being late. You know I love you in those white fleecy things. And it 's so simple, too."

"It's the first low-necked gown I've had since I was married."

Alice had touched on a dangerous subject: the difference in her worldly condition before marriage and since. After a few moments an indescribable influence forced me to speak.

"I should have been just as pleased if they had n't cut it so low."

"But it is n't much more than open at the neck." Alice declared, turning her face toward me. "Wait till you see what the other women will wear."

"I can't see how that will help the matter."

Then Alice shot her keenest shaft. "It will be a compensation for all I've gone through for you to attend this dinner-party if the experience will only make you a little less provincial."

I leaned back in my seat and Alice sat bolt upright. We did not speak again until we reached Washington Square; but when we started to leave the carriage Alice broke out: "Now you must be very careful about the way you behave, Ned. Don't talk too much. Be reserved. They'll like you better. If you are very quiet, they'll think you're deep. And, above all things, don't talk shop. If they try to make you do it, talk of something else. And be careful not to air any of your pet theories. Don't let them draw you into an argument. That would be simply awful. Be reserved!" she summed up.

Before I could touch the bell, the door opened and we passed into the hall, the atmosphere of which, heavy with furnace heat and with the odor of flowers, seemed to smite our faces. Alice walked straight

up-stairs, and I meekly followed. There are moments, I suppose in the lives of all married men, when they feel like slaves.

Alice turned into one of the large rooms facing the Square, and I entered the room at the opposite side of the hall.

CHAPTER III

WE DINE WITH THE VAN ZANDTS

IT was not until I had removed my coat in front of the mirror and placed it carefully on the bed, that I was able to take an intelligent interest in my surroundings. It was one of those terribly over-ornamented rooms characteristic of an earlier period in New York when taste was not the saleable commodity that it has become in recent years. The walls were covered with a shining yellow paper—Alice has since told me it was satin—with a ridiculous flower-design. On the walls, however, were some good pictures—paintings, chiefly,—that is, the names on the frames I recognised as good. I make no claim to be anything of an art critic: if I had my choice, even with plenty of money, I would n't have a painting in a gilt frame in the house. However, as Alice frequently remarks in my presence, that comment is of no importance. The hangings at the windows I liked; they were of some plain yellow stuff, without design, and they harmonised with the hue of the wall-paper. Of the furniture in the room, the bed interested me most. It was one of those big mahogany four-posters, and over the yellow silk coverlet had been spread a piece of filmy lace. The other furniture ought to have been mahogany, but

it was not. It was conglomerate both as to material and color, and the effect, though it suggested wealth and an old-fashioned taste, was curiously disturbing. Beside the bed I noticed a table with a rack containing books. "Ha!" I said to myself. "Now we will judge what the tastes of these rich people are like." I went over to the table stealthily, as if I were doing something that reflected on my manners, and I looked over the titles of the books. They were all novels, two by Conan Doyle, one by Marie Corelli, and "When Knighthood Was in Flower." I gasped and turned away.

As I was examining the pictures, two young fellows came laughing up the stairs and dashed into the room. One was blond and rosy-cheeked and innocent-looking; the other had dark, close-cropped hair and a small moustache over his full lips. They both glanced at me and then they proceeded to tear off their overcoats as if eager to rush down-stairs again.

"I wonder what my fate will be to-night," said the dark one.

"I'll bet that I take out Letty Henderson," the blond replied. "I've taken her out five times in three weeks."

"Well, you're in luck. I have n't even seen her for nearly a week. It looks like a conspiracy, Monty, your meeting her so often."

The pink-faced boy turned to the mirror and, seizing one of the silver-backed military brushes, proceeded to arrange his tousled hair. "Gee! I'm getting thinner and thinner!" he exclaimed. "I've lost forty pounds since I came down from the country.

That's three months ago. You're good at mathematics, Teddy. Just tell me how much longer I'm likely to last."

Teddy looked critically at his friend. By this time I had assumed an attitude of absorption in front of one of the pictures. I admired the boys' indifference to my presence. "Let me see," said Teddy, "your weight last summer must have been—"

"One hundred and fifty-five," Monty explained.

"One hundred and fifty-five." The expression of the dark youth's face changed from indifference to amusement.

"I've lost forty pounds since then," Monty repeated.

Teddy walked toward the mirror and looked over Monty's shoulder. "I don't see how you can last through the winter," he said, adjusting his white necktie. "It's beautiful, though," he went on reflectively, "the way you keep your complexion."

"That's hectic, the doctor says."

"Try another doctor," Teddy commented.

"Have n't you noticed how I've coughed lately?"

"I've noticed it whenever your father has been around. He seems to have a very *draughty* effect on you."

For a few moments Monty studied his face in the mirror. Then he suddenly burst into a spasm of laughter. He literally doubled up. "Say, Teddy," he exclaimed, "that's great."

At this point Teddy seemed to become, so to speak, aware of my presence. He turned to me, smiled pleasantly, and said;

"This looks like a stag-party, don't it?"

"Don't it!" Monty repeated, mockingly. "Teddy, you'd better go back to school."

"I guess we're ahead of time," Teddy remarked, unruffled.

"Say, I noticed an awfully pretty girl in the other room," said Monty, his blue eyes shining.

"What's she like?" Teddy asked.

"Awfully pretty," Monty repeated, "with a regular porcelain complexion."

"And porcelain teeth?" said Teddy, carelessly.

From across the room I could see my face in the big mirror. I hoped it was the light that made it look so red.

"Perhaps I shall take her out to dinner!" Monty exclaimed, and he began to dance about the room. The boys seemed to have forgotten all about me. "If I can get at Mrs. Van Zandt first, I'll ask her to let me!"

"Who the deuce can she be?" Teddy asked, and then his eyes fell on me. I looked at him, wondering if he would have wit enough to realize the situation. But he only said: "Did you come alone, sir?" Being addressed as "sir" made me feel suddenly old.

"No, I came with my wife," I replied, with as much dignity as I could achieve.

The two boys looked at each other and then they laughed aloud, the idiots! Teddy turned to me again. "We must seem beastly rude. But, of course, we did n't mean anything."

"Of course not," I replied with a smile, but feeling somehow at a disadvantage. I walked toward the

door and in one corner of the mirror I could see the boys exchanging glances.

In the hall I met two ladies, one young and the other not so young, standing in their wraps, and talking and laughing. They had either come in together or they had met at the door. Alice was nowhere in sight. A handsome man in a long black coat came up the stairs and passed me. From the dressing-room I could hear the laughter of the two boys. Still Alice did not come. I began to fear that something had happened to her. The boys passed me and, unconscious of my presence, ran gaily down the stairs. After a few moments, Alice *burst* into the hall. I use that word because it is the only word that describes the effect on me. I had never seen her look so pretty. Her eyes shone, her cheeks were flushed, and her lips were parted in one of her radiant smiles. And as for her gown! In our little apartment it had not seemed so remarkable. But here!

"Well!" she said, laughing, when I had stepped forward to meet her.

"I thought you'd gone away on the fire-escape!" I whispered.

As we entered the drawing-room Mrs. Van Zandt came up to us. "Oh, Mrs. Foster," she said, with the air of surprise that so many women adopt when they greet people whom they have been expecting to see. "I'm delighted that you could come." Then Mrs. Van Zandt turned to me and, before Alice could present me, she offered her hand. "It's so good of you to consent to be frivolous for a time, Mr. Foster."

Mrs. Van Zandt had one of those pretty faces that

easily assume an artificial smile, giving a general assent to everything in the world. Beneath her air of good humor and ease I detected a nervous apprehension. As she turned to us she had looked extremely pretty and young; but after she began to move her head, with the swiftness of the alert hostess, I saw that she had reached the terrible age when, with every change of light, beauty betrays the marks of time. At one moment she appeared to be about thirty-two; at another, it would have been kind to call her forty.

"Oh, there is some one here who wants to meet you," said Mrs. Van Zandt, glancing at Alice and then letting her eyes roam over the room.

"To meet *me*?" said Alice. "Who in the world can want to meet me? I'm so used to being my husband's wife," she went on vaguely, and, to my great relief, Mrs. Van Zandt suddenly broke away from us. Alice is continually pretending that she plays second fiddle to me.

For a few moments Alice and I stood together. It was a curiously embarrassing position: we really felt awkward in each other's presence.

"Hideous house!" Alice said in a low voice. "As they only rent it for the winter, I suppose they did n't want to take the trouble to refurnish. But this drawing-room is n't so bad," she conceded. "It's not overcrowded, at any rate, like so many New York drawing-rooms, and those red damask hangings are stunning."

At sight of Mrs. Van Zandt approaching, with little Monty following, we instinctively drew away

from each other. I call Monty little because he gave me the impression of littleness; as a matter of fact he was somewhat taller than I was myself, and his slimness made him look extremely graceful in his evening clothes. Mrs. Van Zandt introduced him to us as Mr. Dyer. As soon as she had spoken his name, he burst into a loud roar.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed, and I noticed his voice seemed several degrees deeper than it had been upstairs. "That 's an awfully good joke on your husband."

"What is?" Alice asked.

"Why, the way I talked about you before him. I guess he wanted to punch my head off."

"Oh, no!" I replied, with noble carelessness.

Mrs. Van Zandt rested her hand on my arm and walked forward toward a handsomely dressed woman with an extremely plump and graceful neck, which she was not afraid of displaying.

"Mrs. Eustace, I know you love clever people," she said and, as she mentioned my name, I bowed low, wondering, as I often do at such moments, why we poor literary men should so persistently be treated as fools.

"Are you really clever?" said Mrs. Eustace indifferently, looking into my face. Her eyes were fine and dark, and she had a clear, open forehead. She had the beauty, too, that comes less from regularity of feature than from perfect health and poise. She must have been about Mrs. Van Zandt's age; but she looked as if she had not lived nearly so long, or rather as if it had not been nearly so hard for her to live so

long. I could not imagine her dodging trying lights: with her dazzling complexion she could face a search-light.

"I never know what to say when people ask me that," I replied, and something in my voice or manner made Mrs. Eustace look at me sharply.

"Then I believe you are n't clever," she remarked, with a smile that revealed large white teeth. "What a relief! Clever people are such bores."

I must have looked astonished, for she laughed in my face. I felt a little resentful.

"I believe you are clever yourself," I said.

"Of course I'm clever. I was born so, and I've never regretted anything so much in my life.

"There is nothing in the world so tiresome as cleverness. It makes people nervous. It wears them out trying to keep up with you, and they are always afraid of appearing stupid, if they miss any of your sallies. At dinner-parties I have seen an atmosphere of gloom and hate descend upon the table because one clever person was present. We all pretend that we like cleverness, you know, but we simply dread it," she went on. "My cleverness has been the greatest curse of my life. Among other things, it has cost me my husband."

I honestly had no idea what she meant. So I pretended to accept her remark as a joke, and I laughed foolishly.

"He forced me to divorce him because he could n't endure my conversation. He used to say that it made him tired." She hesitated, amused, I believe, by my astonishment. "Now I think I've told you

enough about myself. From the way Mrs. Van Zandt introduced you, I suppose that you are somebody. How have you managed in so short a time?" Without waiting for me to answer, she went on:

"Nick Van Zandt must have come at last. He's always late."

"Where is he?" I asked. "I've never seen him."

"That swarthy man over there, pulling down his cuffs and talking to Letty Henderson, the pale blonde. Isn't she pretty?"

There was the usual confusion and empty laughter over the seating of the guests, and at last we were adjusted in our proper places. Alice, seated beside Van Zandt and that insufferable Monty, was smiling and talking from one to the other. I felt as if I were miles away from her.

"Nick Van Zandt is a very patient man," Mrs. Eustace went on, keeping her voice low. "He works hard in his railroad office all day long and then he rushes home just in time to get into his tub and his evening clothes. You'd really think he was enjoying himself." Mrs. Eustace reached for a cocktail that stood beside her plate.

As I lifted my glass, I glanced toward Alice, and I perceived that she, too, was drinking a cocktail. Why this sight should have upset me I cannot explain. At home, when we had people to dinner, she always drank cocktails; she had also developed skill in making them. She must have seen me looking at her, for she sent me what she calls her "conjugal smile," the smile she employs when she wishes to let people see that we are perfectly happy, or, as I

tell her, to prove that we are still on speaking terms.

Within two minutes after the cocktails were drunk a strange thing happened. The air was cleared of self-consciousness and embarrassment; every one appeared to be at ease. The talk, desultory and broken before, became general. The eyes of the ladies reflected the soft light of the candles; somehow we all seemed younger. For the first time I noticed how lovely and fresh were the roses banked in the centre of the table. A feeling of peace enveloped me. I assured myself that I was at my best, and yet, beneath all my sense of security, a remote inner-self scrutinised everything, including myself. This inner-self remained cold to the brightness around me, and maintained an attitude that was purely judicial.

"Now you are going to tell me about yourself, are n't you?" said Mrs. Eustace.

Instantly I saw why she was so curious; she had recognised me as an outsider. Well, it was something, I reflected, not to be placed in the category with Monty and Teddy.

"I am a writer," I explained quietly. I don't know why I always feel ashamed when I am called on to tell what I do for a living; I feel sure that doctors and lawyers never feel so, or even business men.

"Ah!" Mrs. Eustace seemed relieved. She had catalogued me! Then she said in a matter-of-fact tone: "What do you write?"

"Novels chiefly. Sometimes short stories, occasionally a magazine article."

"How interesting!" she exclaimed, in the tone she might have employed in saying, "Dear me!" Then she added, as she bent over her oysters: "Now you'll have to tell me your name all over again and the names of all your books."

When I had recited my rather brief list, Mrs. Eustace meditated for a long time. "I've never read a line you've written!" She assumed the air of bravado that I have so often noticed in the women who think they are the first to make that remark to an author. "I don't read anything," Mrs. Eustace went on indifferently. "The little I know I gather from the lectures I go to in houses, from conversations, and from the plays I see."

"From the plays?" I said. "What can you learn from them?"

"Among other things, you can learn what idiots playwrights are!" Mrs. Eustace turned her radiant smile on me. "Don't tell me you are a playwright among your other accomplishments."

"Everybody who writes is a playwright, or thinks he is," I explained. "We all have plays up our sleeves or in our heads."

"Well, why in the world don't you get your plays produced? I'm sure they can't be worse than the plays we've been having this winter."

"Oh, Mrs. Eustace has been going to the theatre!" exclaimed Mrs. Van Zandt, across the table, catching at a topic. "Do tell us what is good."

"You ought to see the new comic opera at The Gaiety. It's great!" cried Monty Dyer. "There's a girl in it—she does n't come on till the third act—

but she's the whole show. I forget her name, but she's wonderful. She sings an awfully funny song. Gee! I wish you could hear it. The words are great."

A silence followed, in which Monty became very ridiculous. I inwardly rejoiced. He evidently realised his position, for his pink face turned scarlet, and he turned to Alice to insist that the girl was "great."

"We must go and see her," said Alice, with the purpose of putting the poor boy at ease.

"Suppose we have a theatre party," Mrs. Van Zandt suggested.

"Oh, that would be ripping!" Monty exclaimed, plainly feeling that he had been vindicated, and becoming important again.

"We're going to have one theatre party next week," Van Zandt said in an anxious tone.

"Oh, yes, dear Lily Valentine is going to act in her new play," his wife assented.

"One theatre party in a week is quite enough for me!" Van Zandt looked around the table for support.

Monty perceived that the tide had turned against him again. In his next remark I detected the spirit of compromise. "Well, then, let's all go to see her. I'd rather see her than that other woman, anyway. Gee! I wish I could remember her name."

"Monty's bad memory is his salvation," said Letty Henderson, in a sweet voice that suited her delicate beauty. "He's always falling in love with actresses; but, after a day or so, he can't even remember their names."

"Well, it's understood that we are all going to see

We Dine with the Van Zandts 33

Miss Valentine, is n't it?" said Mrs. Van Zandt. "Let me count. There are nine of us here. We'll have two boxes."

"You'll have to hustle if you expect to get 'em for Lily Valentine's first night," said Monty.

"The house must have been sold out already," remarked the dark-faced man whom I had seen upstairs. Vaguely, through the maze of the talk, I had been wondering who he was. As if in response to my question, Mrs. Van Zandt turned to him and said:

"When are we going to see your portrait of Miss Valentine, Mr. Cosgrave?"

"Whenever you will come to my studio," the artist replied, in a low, serious voice. Something about his voice interested me, and I observed that Alice was interested too.

"Then it is finished?" Mrs. Eustace asked.

"If a portrait is ever finished," Cosgrave deprecatingly replied.

"Art is long!" Monty Dyer exclaimed in a mocking tone, and, by his very impertinence, making every one laugh.

Mrs. Eustace, turned to me again. "Now tell me what kind of stories you write. All about love's young dream, I suppose? Or are you one of those people who write those absurd things that they call historical novels?"

"I don't write historical novels and I avoid love's young dream just as much as I can," I replied.

"Then what in the world is there left to write about?"

"The everyday doings of everyday people."

"Does any one care to read such things?"

"A few," I remarked, trying to maintain an appearance of good humour.

"There are just two good things in life," Mrs. Eustace went on, ignoring the trend of the talk, or wishing to avoid following it. "They are love and money. Love is the great illusion; money is the great reality. And in the end you will find that the only permanent comfort can come from reality."

Mrs. Eustace suddenly turned and spoke to Teddy Markoe, who was sitting beside her.

"Are you getting ready for the Horse Show?" she said.

"Well, rather," he replied.

"Teddy's going to enter three horses," Monty explained.

"I hope you're going to be in the old place," said Teddy, addressing Mrs. Van Zandt.

"Oh, yes. Nick has managed that. There's one thing he is really interested in. We shall be there every night."

"I'm interested in everything," Van Zandt remarked wearily. "The only trouble is, I have n't two lives."

"No one has any time in New York," said Mrs. Eustace. Then she threw a bit of bread across the table. "That is, no one but our painter-man over there. And he has time because he never does anything that he does n't want to do."

"It's very important to be selfish in this world," Cosgrave remarked. "In New York it's absolutely necessary. If I were n't selfish I never should accomplish anything."

"And no one would take any interest in you," said Van Zandt, with a laugh.

"Exactly."

"Gee! I 've never accomplished anything," said Monty, in a tone intended to reach Alice, but heard by every one at the table.

"And you probably never will, Monty," Mrs. Eustace remarked. "That 's one reason why you are so amusing."

"Monty is going to become one of the pillars of our new leisure-class," said Van Zandt.

"Oh, I say now, this is n't fair," Monty exclaimed.

"But I should like to know why Mr. Cosgrave is so proud of being selfish," said Mrs. Van Zandt, to keep the talk general.

"Simply because I wish to be as useful to society as I can be," the painter replied. "If I paid attention to all the claims on my time, I should simply dissipate myself. So I have established a system. A certain number of hours in the day I work. The rest of the time I amuse myself, for the sake of getting refreshment for my work. If I did n't exercise selection in my amusements, I should be bored and I should get no refreshment."

"In other words, we amuse Mr. Cosgrave," exclaimed Mrs. Eustace in a loud voice.

The painter bowed. "You not only amuse, Mrs. Eustace. You edify!"

The talk became animated and personal, relating, however, wholly to people in the little social world to which the Van Zandts belonged. Much of it touched on scandals that had occurred or were likely

to occur, and to engagements that had been announced or were about to be announced or that really existed, though they were strenuously and repeatedly denied by those concerned. Naturally, Alice and I had nothing to say; but I noticed that, throughout the ordeal, which lasted till nearly the close of the dinner, Alice maintained her poise; she acted as if she knew the people referred to, and occasionally she would turn to Nicholas Van Zandt and say something that made him laugh. I felt miserably uncomfortable, but I resolved not to speak; it was far more dignified to keep silent than to "butt in." When, at last, Mrs. Van Zandt rose from the table, I could almost have cried out for joy; but my spirits drooped again as she said:

"I suppose you men will want to stay here and smoke your cigars."

"Then I shall stay with them!" exclaimed Mrs. Eustace. "I sha'n't be cheated out of my cigarette."

"Let us compromise by going into the library," Van Zandt suggested.

As we crossed the hall, I seized a chance to speak to Alice. "Was n't it awful—that last half-hour?" I whispered.

"You behaved splendidly," she whispered in reply. "You looked so scornful."

"Scornful?" I repeated, amazed.

"Just as if you refused to take part in their silly talk because you were superior to it. I know it impressed Mr. Van Zandt. He said some awfully nice things about you."

We Dine with the Van Zandts 37

"Don't you smoke!" I whispered, just as Mrs. Van Zandt came up to us.

I instantly regretted having delivered that warning. As the cigarettes were passed around, I felt certain that Alice would disobey me, just to be perverse. With the greatest aplomb, and covertly giving me one of her quick glances, she took a cigarette. To my astonishment, the pretty blonde girl smoked too.

For half an hour Mrs. Van Zandt kept moving us about as if we were pawns on a chess-board. With Nicholas Van Zandt I engaged in a laboured talk of a few minutes, during which I managed to show how much I did not know about railroads. I had better luck with Letty Henderson, chiefly because she talked nearly all the time about Alice. "I 'm going to ask your wife to let me come to see her," she said. "I want so much to know her." Perhaps another reason why I liked her was because she actually knew about my writing. She had read one of my stories and she thought it was "lovely," all but the ending. Then, of course, I had to explain my theory about unhappy endings. "You see, the great thing is to make people talk about what you have written. If you just please them with a story, they 'll forget all about it. But if you first please them, and then pique them at the end, they 'll argue about it." She explained that she had never looked at it in that way before and it was "certainly very interesting." "But, do you know," she remarked innocently, "you are the first author I've ever met? Isn't it strange? I know ever so many painters, like Mr. Cosgrave. They seem to

have more time to go about in society than authors do."

"I should think they would have less time," I said.

"Why?" she ingenuously asked, fixing her appealing eyes on my face.

"Because their working hours are so much longer."

She clasped her hands as if I had said something deeply impressive.

"Are they, really?"

"Most of the painters that I know work all day long. But the writers never work more than three or four hours a day."

"How strange! What an easy time they must have!"

"Not so easy. It's desperate business, writing. After three or four hours of writing I always feel played out."

"Fancy!" she murmured sympathetically. Then she added: "But most of the artistic people I know are portrait painters. I suppose they have plenty of time because they can work only when people are sitting to them. And it bores people so dreadfully to sit. All my friends hate it."

At this moment Mrs. Van Zandt's manœuvring sent Mr. Cosgrave in our direction. "Perhaps you can tell us why painters go into society more than writers do," I remarked.

"It's just a matter of business," he replied with a knowing smile. "They are on the watch for people to victimise."

"Oh, how mercenary!" said Miss Henderson.

"Of course; we are all mercenary," Cosgrave

went on. "Or, rather, we all have some axe to grind."

Miss Henderson pretended to be shocked. "That's a dreadful way of looking at things."

Cosgrave turned to me. "Everything can be reduced to business, can't it, Mr. Foster? Now I'll venture to say that Foster has been making mental notes about us all the evening. That's why he's been so quiet."

"Oh, no!" I exclaimed, with fervent virtue.

"I won't believe it of him!" said Miss Henderson, giving me one of her appealing glances.

Cosgrave threw back his shoulders defiantly. "Now I've found an ideal subject to-night."

"Oh, I know," said Miss Henderson. "I knew it the very moment I saw you meet her. It made me jealous."

"I've been trying for two years to persuade Miss Henderson to sit to me," the painter explained.

"But I never have any time, Mr. Cosgrave."

Cosgrave ignored the remark. He had the air of the man who is perfectly aware of what he wants and is not afraid to ask for it. "Your wife told me to consult you when I asked her to pose."

I heard myself laughing nervously. "She was just pretending that she did n't have her own way about everything."

Miss Henderson saw Mrs. Van Zandt walking toward us. "It's really time for me to go, Nina," she said, with her lovely smile. "I ordered the carriage for ten and it's long past that now."

"It was so good of you to come, dear," said Mrs.

Van Zandt, with a readiness so free from regret that it seemed like an invitation to the rest of us to go, too.

Alice came forward, and a moment later we were saying good-night.

As soon as I entered the carriage and had banged the door behind me, I sank back into the seat.

"It was hard for you, dear, was n't it?" said Alice, tenderly.

"How about you?" I asked, taking her hand.

"Well—" She hesitated. "You know that saying of Goethe's you are always quoting: 'Every beginning is hard.'"

"But it won't seem so hard if it's the end too."

"Oh, but, dearest, we're committed now. Of course, we shall have to go to Miss Valentine's first night. That will be really worth while. Mrs. Van Zandt spoke of it just as I was leaving." Then Alice suddenly changed the subject. "Was n't Mrs. Eustace nice? I had such a good talk with her. She's coming to see me."

"She's a divorced woman."

"Well, naturally," Alice replied in a tone of injury, "I know that. The papers were full of it two years ago. That is why she is so defiant about it. I suppose she informed you herself."

"Well, don't tell me the details."

"I won't, dear," Alice replied in her most patient manner. "I won't, until you ask for them." Then she went on cheerfully: "Still, being divorced is really ceasing to be a distinction in New York."

CHAPTER IV

WE ATTEND LILY VALENTINE'S FIRST NIGHT

THE next day Alice rose early. Staying up late makes her remarkably bright at breakfast. As I dragged myself to the table, she looked at me sympathetically:

"You poor dear!" she said.

"There must be something the matter with my nervous system," I remarked. "It's no use: I cannot dissipate. I have to spend a quiet evening to get my nerves soothed for rest."

"But it was such a mild dissipation, Edward."

"Well, you're made of cast-iron, anyway."

The coffee stimulated me. Where Alice learned to make such coffee I have never been able to find out; it must be a natural gift. I felt as if I had received an infusion of life and I believe that I should have gone cheerfully to my desk if Alice had not remarked in a tone that fairly lilted with patronage: "Now you must get some good work done this morning, Ned."

I cannot explain why, but the tone, rather than the words, took all ambition out of me. Without speaking, I rose and entered the library. I sat at my desk and I listlessly took a pile of blank sheets and stared at it. There was not an idea in my head. I glanced

over at the manuscript that stood on the little stand beside the typewriter: Alice ought to have had it copied long before; but for a week she had not touched the machine. A feeling of despair overwhelmed me. I wished that I had never become an author, and I envied those men who went to business every day and had definite tasks which gave them something to work on. It was fearful to think of sitting at that desk morning after morning and spinning fiction out of my head. After all, what did it amount to? Now those people last night: if I had been a railroad man like Van Zandt, or even a painter like Cosgrave, they would have found me interesting. I wondered absently if I could have made a success in business, or if it were too late for me to try something else besides authorship? As I sat with my hands resting on the blotter I heard Alice approaching. I seized my pen and, as she entered, I pretended that I was writing.

"Busy?" she said in a tone of self-conscious cheerfulness.

"No!" I exclaimed.

Alice walked straight out of the room. "Dear me!" I heard her say, "we shall die of starvation."

An idea suddenly occurred to me: I would write a sketch satirising our evening at the Van Zandts'. For two hours I wrote feverishly. Then I felt a hand stroking my head and I heard a voice whisper. "Good little boy." I stopped and drew Alice down to me. For several moments we did not speak. Then I said: "Well, I guess I've made twenty-five dollars out of last night's experience."

Alice shrugged her shoulders. "Just half our rent," she conceded. "But you must n't let yourself get side-tracked again. You've lost a day on the novel."

"I'll do some work on it this afternoon," I conceded. "Here, let me read."

Alice shook her head. "Not a word. I must look after luncheon."

As I entered the dining-room, Alice was placing the cakes on the table. "I thought I'd help Mary out as much as I could to-day," she said. "She's not in a very amiable mood."

"Well, I have n't been either, dear," I exclaimed, touched by my own magnanimity. "But I feel all right now, and I've got a bird of an appetite for these griddle-cakes."

As soon as we had finished our meal, I found my pipe on the mantel, filled. I smiled, pretending that I did n't know Alice was watching. As I lit the pipe, I said: "Is n't it great that we can be here all day and have our nice luncheon together? How much better this is than tearing into a restaurant and tearing out again and rushing back to an office! I suppose Van Zandt does that a good part of the time."

Alice brushed a piece of lint off my arm and looked me over with the wife's judicial eye. We walked together into the living-room, where we often sit for a while after meals. I threw myself backward on the couch, and I blew the smoke from my pipe slowly toward the ceiling.

"Well, there's no place like home," I remarked.

"Don't say that, Edward," said Alice. "It's so stupid and bourgeois."

We could hear the rumbling of the elevated trains, and through the small, old-fashioned panes of glass in our windows I could see the ugly New York skyline. From scores of chimneys smoke was rising. To the left stood the mountainous Waldorf-Astoria, bursting with its hordes of millionaires.

"Let me see," Alice remarked, apparently talking to herself. She hesitated. "What a nuisance!"

I went on smoking.

"Whom can I ask to meet Mrs. Van Zandt at luncheon?"

I puffed rapidly.

Alice looked at me and laughed. "Isn't it a queer complication?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," I untruthfully replied.

"You see, I can't ask Mrs. Eustace or Letty Henderson for two reasons: they have n't called on me and they have n't invited me to anything."

"In other words, as lawyers say, there's no consideration. It's a finely organised business, society, is n't it?"

"It's just like our own society, Edward. We are always exchanging dinners with our friends."

This time I rose on my elbow. "And you know perfectly well how sick that makes me. If there's any expression of yours that I hate worse than any other it's 'Now we ought to invite so-and-so to dinner.' There ought n't to be any *ought* about it. We ought to ask people to dinner because we like them and because we want them, not because we have debts to pay."

Alice let my words echo through the room.

"How absurd you are, Edward! In a place like Lumley, Wisconsin, your ideas are perfectly correct. There, of course, people just *drop in*. But in New York it's altogether different."

"Well, I like to have people drop in."

"Perhaps you would n't like it so much if you had to do the housekeeping. You don't realise that 'dropping in' is the horror of housekeepers, even in Lumley. It's the cause of the most dreadful domestic tragedies."

"That's simply because the housekeepers don't know their business," I said, tapping the bowl of my pipe with my forefinger. "Why don't they keep plenty of canned food in the house."

"And poison people?"

"Better poison them than give them hospitality that's insincere."

"Well, I don't see what I'm to do," said Alice, illogically, in order to check my flippancy.

"Send her a meal-ticket," I grunted.

Alice drew her lips together. "If people who write you those silly letters about your books only knew how you talk at home!"

I smiled and kicked out my feet.

"It's really dreadful," Alice lamented, "to think of the people we don't know."

"And whom we'd like to invite to luncheon," I went on. "That is, indeed, a tragedy. Could n't you look up some names in the society columns and send them circulars?"

"Of course," Alice went on imperturbably, "we can't ask any of *our* friends."

"Our friends are n't good enough to meet Mrs. Van Zandt! If that is n't a 'roast' on our friends! We don't deserve to have any friends."

"It may be a 'roast,' as you say, on Mrs. Van Zandt," Alice remarked, with a lift of her eyebrows. Then her face brightened. "After all, why would n't it be a good idea? We might get some of the freak people together."

I twisted my neck into an exceedingly uncomfortable position in order to rebuke Alice with a stern look. "Make them ridiculous in order to amuse Mrs. Van Zandt! Is that the idea?"

"They make themselves ridiculous," Alice tersely remarked. As I sank back into a more comfortable position, she continued: "Think how Amory Lambert would love to exploit himself before Mrs. Van Zandt. Don't you remember, that day we were in the street-car with him, how he fairly basked in the attention he received from the other passengers? He did n't seem to mind their laughing at him a bit."

"He's cut his hair," I said, as if this fact somehow discredited Alice's remarks.

"But his profile is still beautiful," Alice exclaimed with a laugh.

While Alice busied herself with some sewing, I lay on my back and sank peacefully to sleep. When I awoke, she was sitting in the same position, but with her knees covered with a yellow silk skirt.

"What are you doing?" I asked, dreamily.

"Making over a gown."

"For what?"

"For Saturday night."

"Oh!"

"Had you forgotten?" Alice began to work more rapidly. Without waiting for me to reply, she went on: "It seems a pity to *commit* this to an evening gown; but it would be foolish to try to resort to a makeshift. I really ought to have a new gown."

"What's the matter with the gown you wore last night?"

"Of course I could n't wear that with the same people."

"Why not?"

"Because they'd notice."

"What of it?"

"Now, Edward, you know better. As you've been lying asleep there, I've been thinking that your way is the best. They'll like us all the better if we're independent. That's what decided me to alter this gown, that and a suggestion I got from Letty Henderson's gown last night. So it won't cost us anything."

I pondered these remarks so long that Alice whispered: "Asleep?"

"No."

"What's the matter?"

"The complications."

"There can't be any."

"There always are at a theatre-party. In the first place, there's the hideous possibility of supper."

"Oh, no, we'll come straight home."

"Then it's understood that if they ask us out to supper, you'll refuse?"

"Of course."

During the next few days I felt better, chiefly because I accomplished a lot of work. On reading over the Van Zandt sketch, I had been disappointed with it and thrown it aside, and I had returned with zest to the novel. It seemed now as if I could surely get a big price for it as a serial, perhaps four cents a word. On this basis Alice and I used to count our daily earnings. One day, when we found I had earned nearly seventy-five dollars, I went out and bought Alice some flowers. We spent the evening considering what we should do when we got rich enough to have a house of our own, and we agreed that we should be perfectly happy if we could have a little place in the country with at least one horse and a half-dozen dogs.

"Not too far away, you know," Alice said. "Perhaps somewhere in Westchester County, where we could get in and out to the theatre."

I shivered. "Oh, that late train! Would n't it be better to go farther out and then stay in town whenever we went to the theatre?"

"Think how rich we shall be when we get our plays produced!" Alice said, inconsequently, clasping her hands.

"We'd better write them first."

"They say that Walter Hart makes a hundred and fifty thousand a year. He's written the new play for Miss Valentine, you know."

On Saturday night Alice appeared at dinner in the altered gown. I should hardly have known it. It looked new and, as critics say of writing, it "betrayed the influence" of other gowns seen at the Van

Zandts'. Just what this influence was I could not describe; it was subtle, but, like all subtle things, it made an immense difference. Alice must have suspected what I was thinking, for she laughed knowingly and said: "We must live and learn, Edward."

"You are a very quick study," I remarked.

"If anything ever happens to you, I shall set up shop as a fashionable dressmaker. I'll put out a nice little sign on Fifth Avenue—'Mademoiselle Alice—Modes.' Would n't it be splendid, Ned, if you could have a play produced and have me mentioned on the programmes as the designer of the costumes?"

The evening was so pleasant that we decided to walk part way to the theatre. We crossed Stuyvesant Square and made our way to Fourteenth Street, crowded with people and brilliant with electric light from Tony Pastor's and from the restaurants and dance-halls. That part of the town I had always disliked; but I knew that Alice revelled in it. "Is n't it lovely to be right in the midst of so much wickedness!" she said. We turned into Irving Place, walking slowly. "This is the dearest spot in the whole city," said Alice. "I'd rather live here than on Riverside Drive. See that nice row of little brick houses over there. Would n't it be splendid if we could only have one of those?" She sighed luxuriously. "Well, perhaps we can some day if you'll only be more industrious, Edward,—and less literary."

At Fourth Avenue Alice suddenly became tired and we boarded a cable-car. From Madison Avenue we had to walk, and as we approached the theatre we found it blocked with carriages and with a crowd

of people. As I pushed my way ahead Alice clung tightly to my arm. "Oh, is n't this dreadful!" she gasped. "We have n't any tickets, and suppose we can't get in! Suppose we should miss them!"

In the lobby, however, we found Monty Dyer and Teddy Markoe with Miss Henderson. They hailed us as if we were participating in a huge joke.

"Where are the Van Zandts?" Alice asked.

"They are always late," Miss Henderson explained.

"Van Zandt has to have his cigar," said Teddy.

"Mrs. Wainwright Smith is coming, too," said Miss Henderson, as if this fact provided the cause of our waiting.

"Oh, well, then, we'll be lucky if we get in before the second act," cried Monty. "She's probably dining with the Van Zandts, and they'll have to bind and gag her to make her stop talking and to get her out of the house."

At that moment the Van Zandts appeared accompanied by a bright-eyed little woman with gray hair and a face that somehow seemed youthful without really being youthful. "Well, we've nearly broken our necks to get here," the little woman exclaimed, glancing from Letty Henderson to the two boys. When Mrs. Van Zandt had presented Alice and me, Mrs. Smith went on: "I gave my word to Lily Valentine that I'd be here before the curtain went up. If I'm not, she'll never forgive me."

"Then you'd better give the tickets for the other box to Monty, dear," said Mrs. Van Zandt to her husband. "You young unmarried people," she went on lightly, "are to go with Mrs. Eustace and Mr. Cosgrave."

I saw Monty's face droop, and for a moment an expression that was positively wicked appeared in Teddy's dark eyes.

"Have we got to wait for them?" Monty asked with boyish ruefulness, and Teddy at once replied:

"Here—I'll take Letty into the box and you bring Mrs. Eustace and Cosgrave along when they come."

"That will be splendid," said Mrs. Van Zandt, with a humorous appreciation of Teddy's nerve.

But Letty Henderson protested. "I don't mind waiting," she explained.

"Now, my child, don't make the situation difficult," said Mrs. Smith, with the authority of a veteran. "There's no knowing when those silly, middle-aged people will get here. They are both terrible dawdlers. Besides, Lily Valentine won't want the box to be empty when the curtain goes up. So come along," she added, starting for the entrance-gate. "It will do Monty good to wait."

"Well, give Lily a good hand in case I'm not there when she comes on," Monty called after us.

I noticed that Letty Henderson seemed confused and I wondered why. Mrs. Van Zandt, too, showed apprehension in her face. Alice afterward explained that Letty objected to being seen in the box with Teddy without a chaperon and that Mrs. Van Zandt did not have presence of mind enough to meet the situation. It happened, however, that the two boxes were adjoining, and Van Zandt, after seeing us settled in our box, stepped out and took a place beside Miss Henderson.

The curtain had not yet risen and the orchestra

was noisily playing. The seats were nearly all filled; a crowd of men stood at the back. Most of the other boxes were occupied, the women who sat in front creating a curious effect of bare shoulders, feathers, and white gloves. For a few moments we surveyed the house, all green and gold, with meaningless and fantastic ornamentation. Mrs. Smith, plainly a woman of quick impressions, drew her lips together and addressed us in a low voice: "Jewy."

We all smiled; but no one spoke. "Isn't it extraordinary," Mrs. Smith went on, "the way the Jews are running this town? Why, they control all our theatres."

"They are an extraordinary people," said Van Zandt, less for the purpose of being trite, as Alice would say, than for the sake of giving Mrs. Smith's comment civil attention. "I hate to get up against them in business."

"They don't leave anything for anybody else," Mrs. Smith broke out. "But Lily says they are paying her splendidly. This year they are going to give her five hundred dollars a week and a percentage of the receipts. Upon my word, I'm almost sorry I'm not an actress myself. I've a good mind to ask Lily for an engagement."

"Mrs. Smith discovered Miss Valentine," said Mrs. Van Zandt, turning to Alice, as if afraid we might be misled by the vivacious lady's talk.

"Good heavens, no!" exclaimed Mrs. Smith. "I did n't discover her. That is," she explained, depreciatingly, "I never did anything for her as an actress. I met her one day at the Howlands'. They're some

dear friends of mine, newspaper people that I met one winter in the South. They are fond of actors and Bohemians of all kinds. I love to go to see them. Lily was the prettiest creature—she must have been about seventeen then. They told me she was an actress, the daughter of old Tom Valentine, who used to be a stage-manager or something of the sort in New York. Well, I nearly fainted away when I heard that this chit of a girl had been on the stage for three years. She did n't have any position then—it seems to me, from what Lily says, that most of them are out of positions half the time—and she was dreadfully poor. Well, I had a good talk with her and I liked her so much that I asked her to come and see me. Then that summer she stayed with me for a few weeks in my place at Narragansett, and we've been great friends ever since."

"Mrs. Smith is leaving out the most important part," interposed Mrs. Van Zandt. "She introduced Miss Valentine to every one in New York who could help her. That is what has made her advance so rapidly."

"Well, to be perfectly frank, I often wonder what it is that has made Lily do so well. It must be her looks. I often say to her: 'Lily, I love you, but I don't think you can act for two cents.'"

"How does she like that?" I ventured to ask.

"Oh, she takes anything from me," Mrs. Smith replied. Then her eyes roamed over the house. "But *is n't* this a monstrosity? Poor Lily told me to be prepared for the worst. 'I like it,' she said. 'It's just my idea of what a theatre ought to be. But I

know you'll hate it.' In some ways Lily has the most awful ideas."

"Don't you think people get queer ideas by living so much in the theatre?" asked Mrs. Van Zandt, with an air of expressing an absolutely new thought.

"Queer?" Mrs. Smith rolled her eyes. "That child fairly flabbergasts me sometimes by the things she says. Upon my word, I feel like an infant beside her. She can talk as if she were about ninety, and then she can suddenly relapse into an innocence that fairly takes my breath away." Her eyes turned toward the auditorium again. "But why don't our architects build at least one decent-looking theatre in New York?"

"It seems to me that most people are way off the track in their idea of what a theatre ought to be," I remarked.

"Do tell us what your idea is," Mrs. Van Zandt urged.

Now this was the very purpose I was leading up to; but by being suddenly invited to exploit my views, I felt uncomfortable. At that instant, too, I realised that I was afraid of Mrs. Wainwright Smith. There was something terribly piercing about those little eyes.

"It seems to me that all this ornamentation and colouring are wrong," I began, and I saw that Mrs. Smith was disappointed. So I was put on my mettle. "I wish that we could have a theatre as simple as a Greek temple."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Smith, shaking her head sympathetically. "Does n't it seem strange that after the

Greeks showed how things should be done, people should ever have been such idiots as to work in any other way. Well, now go ahead, and tell us about your theatre."

I felt my face flushing. "I guess that's all," I replied, feeling that I was expected to say something fine, and fearing that my material would give out. "I'd have the exterior of stone," I went on, "not merely because it's more beautiful and lasting, but because it's safer from fire. Most of our theatres are cheap, transient things."

"Like this," Mrs. Smith agreed. "It's shoddy. You can see that it's built for mere show. In a few weeks, when it begins to wear a little, the cheapness will be shocking."

"The truth is," I went on, gaining confidence from Mrs. Smith's sympathy, "most of our theatres are built as mere speculations. The managers realise that their business is uncertain, and they can't afford to build theatres of permanent value. Now, a theatre is just as important as any public institution. It's a part of the life of the city. In fact, we can't get along without the theatre," I went on, warming up, but, somehow feeling silly and painfully conscious that, though Alice was keeping her head turned from me, she was listening.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Smith. "I am always saying to Lily that I believe I'll never go to another performance again."

After this setback, I calmed down "With many people it's their only amusement."

"I suppose you'd have columned porticos and all

that," said Mrs. Van Zandt, who had plainly been waiting for a chance to express this surmise.

"I should be willing to leave those details to the architect," I grandly replied. "I should only insist that he keep the exterior absolutely free from ornamentation. The entrance and the lobby I should like to have of stone, too, preferably white marble. The only ornaments should be busts of distinguished playwrights and actors of the past and a few portraits of actors."

"But nothing like those dreadful crayon-portraits of actors that you see in the lobbies of so many of our theatres," exclaimed Mrs. Smith, throwing up her hands.

I shook my head, laughing. "I would only have portraits in oil, that possessed value as works of art. And not one of them should be the portrait of a living actor."

"Oh, Lily Valentine would object to that on the score of advertising," said Mrs. Smith, her little eyes shining.

"Now tell us about the interior of your theatre," said Mrs. Van Zandt, in a tone that I think was not really meant to be patronising. The orchestra had begun to play for the third time, and I noticed that the audience was beginning to be restless.

"For the interior the greatest difficulty," I went on, "would be in achieving simplicity without bareness, and applying a harmonious and quiet colouring without monotony. In a theatre it is, of course, the stage that is really important, and all this superfluous gilt and filigree business merely distracts the interest

and leaves the mind fatigued for the performance. In my theatre," I went on, boldly, "I should n't have any gilt or any hangings or any little Cupids bearing slips with 'Shakespeare' and 'Sheridan' written on them."

"And then you'd have more room in the boxes, would n't you?" said Mrs. Van Zandt, looking at me with a pleading in her eyes that made me feel exceedingly foolish. "And you'd have good, broad seats."

"And by all means keep the theatre small," exclaimed Mrs. Smith. "These big auditoriums are ridiculous—the effects are so dissipated. I'm worried to death for fear Lily won't be heard."

At this point we heard a rustling in the next box, and we knew that Mrs. Eustace had arrived. A few moments later her handsome face leaned toward our box, and we received a whispered greeting. Then, just as the lights suddenly blurred from our sight the green and gold and the shoulders and feathers, Nicholas Van Zandt stealthily returned to us.

"I hope that Lily is going to make good," I heard him whisper to his wife.

The first act represented a New York drawing-room in which all the characters were supposed to be men and women of wealth and position. The men were commonplace and ungrammatical, and the women were not merely vulgar, but in their attitude toward life almost vicious, that is, with the exception of the heroine, who was presented as the redeeming feature, and who, beside the others, seemed curiously out of place, and yet, for this very reason, all the more attractive. The whole thing was grossly

exaggerated; but the people spoke so smartly, they dressed so well, and they all had such an air of assurance, that the impression they made somehow suggested real life. It was plain that the audience was interested in the play and delighted with the beauty and the ingenuousness of the star. When the curtain fell on the first act, I was trying to make up my mind about the girl's qualities.

"I've never seen her do so well," Mrs. Smith conceded. "Walter Hart has helped her immensely. He's worked her nearly to death."

"Then he's trained her for the part?" Alice asked.

"Oh, she says he's the most wonderful trainer that ever lived. He knows all the tricks. And he's especially successful in training women. I wonder if he's in one of those boxes?" Mrs. Smith raised her opera-glass and calmly surveyed the boxes across the theatre. "I thought he might be with the Ormsbys; but he's probably keeping out of sight."

"Where do you suppose he gets his types?" Mrs. Van Zandt asked, addressing Mrs. Smith.

"He makes them up altogether, or exaggerates them from people he meets."

"Does he really *know* anything about society?" Mrs. Van Zandt asked, with sweet reproach in her tone.

"Oh, yes, of a certain kind—the noisy, pushing people. You see, they lend themselves to this sort of thing. But the way he burlesques them is ridiculous. However, that's why people like his plays. I suppose the real thing would seem unnatural to them."

Our talk was interrupted by the appearance at the back of our box of Mrs. Eustace and Cosgrave. At

sight of Cosgrave I had a sense of discomfort, why, I could not have explained, unless it was, possibly, because I noticed the familiar way in which he greeted every one. It was unpleasant, too, his surveying the ladies critically, as if they were specimens of some kind. I had to stand at the back of the box and go on talking, with my mind focussed on what Cosgrave had to say, but gleaning only enough to make me realise that he was complimenting Alice again and speaking of doing the portrait of her. Suddenly the orchestra stopped and we all realised that we had been talking very loudly. A moment later darkness engulfed the theatre, and we went back to our places.

The second act developed the play into a wild melodrama, in which Miss Valentine figured as the central interest in the most exciting scene. As I watched her I could hardly keep from laughing. Her incompetence seemed so childish; it was like an amateur performance; but the audience frantically applauded and called her before the curtain. Mrs. Smith stood in the box and waved her handkerchief, obviously to the delight of the girl, who bowed and smiled toward her. When the excitement had subsided and the orchestra had begun to play again, Mrs. Smith remarked severely: "Could anything be more absurd?"

To my astonishment, Mrs. Van Zandt took the performance seriously. "Really, I had no idea she was so clever," she said.

"Well, I suppose it does take cleverness to fool people," said Mrs. Smith, tartly.

In the third act, which was also the last, the actress had two comedy scenes which she played rather gracefully. "Now this is the sort of thing she ought to do all the time," Mrs. Smith whispered to me. "If her manager had any sense or any interest beyond making money out of her, he would n't let her do anything else." Soon, however, we saw that more trouble was coming. "Oh, dear!" Mrs. Smith groaned. "Still, I suppose, the poor play-man must have a climax for his act."

The climax naturally had to surpass the final scene of the second act and it proved to be a terror. Lily Valentine rushed madly over the stage in a frenzy of anguish, and, to save herself from the villain, was about to stab herself, when her lover entered and rescued her. Again the audience burst into applause more vociferous than before. Miss Valentine came out with her leading man; then she came again alone. When she appeared a third time, some of the men at the back of the theatre, whom I suspected to be ushers, called, "Author! Author!" Miss Valentine turned to the wing and held out her hand; but no one responded. Then she ran off the stage and presently returned, leading forward a pale young man with a bushy brown moustache, a bulging forehead, and a manner of extreme deprecation. He bowed low and, as Miss Valentine drew her hand from his and ran from the stage, cries from the back of the theatre demanded a speech. The playwright thrust his hands into his hip pockets and smiled good-naturedly. He was plainly used to facing audiences. In the hush that followed I noticed that, for an au-

thor, he was remarkably well dressed. His whole appearance, from his shining forehead to his shining patent-leather shoes, suggested perfect grooming.

For several moments he kept the audience waiting. Then, in a light and effeminate voice, he began to speak. "I am very glad you are pleased," he said. "It is my business to please you if I can. So, naturally, your being pleased makes me feel pleased. Consequently, we are all pleased. I'm sure you are all very kind, and I wish you good-night."

He turned and walked in a leisurely way toward the wing. As the curtain fell, the audience, plainly bewildered, perfunctorily applauded and started to leave the theatre.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Smith, "I'm afraid Walter Hart is becoming quite spoiled. If that is n't the most impertinent speech I ever heard in my life!"

At that moment Mrs. Eustace leaned forward from her box. "Are we going behind?" she said, looking from Mrs. Smith to Van Zandt.

"Of course," Mrs. Smith replied. "Lily'd never forgive us if we did n't."

"Perhaps we can persuade her to come out to supper with us," said Van Zandt.

"Oh, that will be ripping!" cried Monty over Mrs. Eustace's shoulder.

I looked at Alice, but Alice had her turned back toward me. At that moment Mrs. Eustace whispered in my ear across the railing: "I'm sure you could write a better play than this with your left hand. I advise you to be very nice to Lily when you meet her. Perhaps she'll give you your chance."

CHAPTER V

I MEET THE GREAT DRAMATIST

AS we were about to make our way to the heavy door leading to the back of the stage, a young man in evening-dress approached Mrs. Smith. "Miss Valentine would like to have you come behind," he said with a deference that had in it something almost servile.

Mrs. Smith offered him her hand. "You're Mr. Sampson, I suppose," she remarked easily. "I've heard Miss Valentine speak of you. She says you're the most wonderful exploiter in the theatrical business."

The young fellow flushed and, without replying, walked forward. He acted as if he held us all in awe.

Mrs. Eustace turned to me, with a quick glance at the little woman. "Isn't she a marvel? She's as much at home here as she would be in her own drawing-room. She can talk theatrical slang as well as any actor."

We found Miss Valentine standing at the back of the stage, surrounded with women and men, in wraps and overcoats. I was astonished to see that her face, which across the footlights looked so fresh and natural, was fairly plastered with make-up. On her eyelashes, the black stuff hung in little lumps.

At sight of Mrs. Smith, the actress waved her hand and darted forward. "Oh, when I saw you in that box," she said, with a husky gasp, "I nearly fainted away. What did you come for?"

"From a philanthropic interest," Mrs. Smith serenely replied. "Not in the least because I thought I should be amused."

"Is n't she dreadful?" said Miss Valentine with a deep gurgling laugh, as she turned to speak to Mrs. Van Zandt. When Alice and I had been presented, she exclaimed:

"So you are the man who wrote *Francesca Bayne*? There's a play in that story—only you want to change the ending. It's too gloomy as it stands."

"My dear child, Francesca would suit you down to the ground," said Mrs. Eustace, and, while I glowed with appreciation of her kindness, I had an intuitive feeling that this generous woman was fibbing for me.

"How did you like this little play?" Miss Valentine asked, holding her head high and with the air of making a challenge.

"My dear," said Mrs. Smith, "if they try to drag you over the country in this dreadful melodrama, I'd rebel, I positively would."

Miss Valentine burst out laughing.

"But do you really suppose the public will endure such rubbish?" Mrs. Smith asked, her eyes darting from one face to another.

"Caroline, you are dreadful," said Mrs. Eustace.

"Well, I speak my mind. What else can one be expected to do?"

"Don't let them depress you," said Mrs. Van Zandt

with her infantile sweetness, and Van Zandt nodded approvingly and exclaimed: "It's all right, Lily. You're going to make a pile of money."

Mrs. Smith rested her hand familiarly on my arm. "Well, all that I can say is that if this young man here can write a nice, wholesome play for you, you'd better get him to do it. Your story is wholesome, is n't it?" Mrs. Smith asked, turning to me.

"Oh, it's perfectly beautiful!" Mrs. Eustace exclaimed, with a smiling glance in my direction, which at once proved to me that she had never read the book.

"I shall have to read it," said Mrs. Smith with a deep sigh. "What a responsibility it is to meet these budding authors!"

Mrs. Van Zandt seized the girl by the hand. "Now, you're coming out to supper with us, are n't you?"

"I've refused three invitations already," the actress whispered, with a covert nod toward the group waiting for a word with her. "I wonder if I'd better. I'm afraid the girls will sit up for me."

"Oh, the girls won't mind, I'm sure," Mrs. Van Zandt urged.

"Very well, I will," Miss Valentine assented. Then she darted back to her other callers.

I turned to Mrs. Van Zandt. "Who are the girls?" I asked.

"Oh, some actresses Lily lives with in Thirty-sixth Street. They are old friends of hers. It's so nice of her to keep on with them."

"After getting so far ahead of them?" I ventured, and Mrs. Van Zandt nodded. "Success usually

causes such separations, does n't it?" she remarked, more epigrammatically than was her wont.

At that moment, Miss Valentine suddenly returned to us. She seemed to do everything by flashes. "You must n't wait for me here," she said. "I have a much better scheme. Now where are we going to eat?"

"I guess the Holland House would be about right," Van Zandt replied.

"Then you people go down there and I'll follow in my cab as soon as I'm dressed."

"Alone?" Mrs. Van Zandt asked, with a little gasp that made the actress smile.

"Of course. Why not? You don't want me to bring poor Ernestine, do you?" She's tired out already. She'll go home in the street-car."

"Now, my dear child," Mrs. Smith interposed, "you are not to go gallivanting around New York alone like that. Some one must stay here and take you down. Fancy your going into a hotel alone at this hour of the night!"

I was about to offer myself as escort, but something in the air constrained me. I suddenly realised that, according to Mrs. Wainwright Smith's code, it would be almost as scandalous for me to accompany Miss Valentine in the cab as for the actress to go alone. While I was taking credit to myself for the worldly shrewdness of my reasoning, to my astonishment I heard Miss Valentine say:

"Well, then, let Mr. Foster wait and take me down."

I bowed low. "I should be delighted!" I exclaimed.

"Let us go," Mrs. Eustace urged. "I'm sure we're in the way here."

Alice walked into the wings with Cosgrave, and disappeared from my sight without giving me a glance. She acted as if she were unconscious of my existence. When the others had disappeared, Miss Valentine turned to me again.

"Now, I know you are bored to death. You don't want to go out to supper any more than I do."

"I confess I am rather at sea," I replied, feeling my face grow hot. "It was all so—so unexpected," I added, lying, as I often do in embarrassment.

"Well, those people must be humoured, I suppose," she remarked. Then she waved her hand toward a young man in a long coat, who had just appeared in the wings.

"There's the great author. Come up and meet another great author," she called out.

When we had been introduced, the playwright pressed his face wearily with both hands:

"Well, Lily, I believe we've landed," he said.

"Did you have any doubt about it?" she asked, with a pretence of indignation.

"Oh, I knew that *you* would land. How could you help it—with a whole houseful of friends?" Walter Hart leaned toward me confidentially. "Lily's the smoothest worker on the stage. She knows how to get all the rich people in New York to come to see her. Then, of course, the rest of the world has to come, too."

"Well, I don't propose to stand here and let you talk about me like that!" Miss Valentine exclaimed,

returning to her group. I heard her explain to them that she positively must go and dress, and I saw her run up the dingy corridor to her dressing-room. Walter Hart watched her with an amused interest.

"She's a good sort, is n't she? She's absolutely unspoiled, that is, so far. There's no knowing when they'll get the big head. She may wake up with it to-morrow. I've seen it grow in a night." He drew out a silver cigarette-case and held it toward me. "It's against the rules," he said, glancing swiftly over the stage, "but everything goes to-night." He buttoned his long coat closely around him. "Belong to the Actors' Club?"

I shook my head. Walter Hart's casual manner made it hard for me to talk.

The playwright gazed fondly at his burning cigarette. I saw that he was using what Alice calls an "acquired manner." I suspected that he was naturally a voluble man; but, with success, he had developed an impressive air of reserve, easily assumed and easily discarded.

"I read a little story of yours the other day," he said thoughtfully. "It seemed to me very pretty."

"Which story was that?" I asked, as if I had a long list to my credit. I noticed that, in spite of myself, I was imitating his manner. I knew, of course, that he meant the last book I had published. Already the others had passed into the peace of death.

"The one with that girl in it,—Francesca Something—Bayne, that's it! Bad name!" he said, with an unpleasant expression of the lips, as if tasting it. "I suppose you know there's a play in that story?"

he went on. "Only I'm afraid it would be too good for 'em." He changed his position impatiently. "That's the worst of working for American audiences. You can't do your best. Now, in England, a man like Pinero can put a whole year on a play and turn out something fine, like *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*—something that will last." Hart shrugged his shoulders. "But the best we can do, after we've caught on, is to turn out stuff as fast as we can and make hay while the sun shines. In England, too, they have a good many advantages over us. When a fellow once catches on with a book or a play over there, he is sure of two markets, his own and the American market. But when we catch on over here, the English have no use for us."

"But some of our novelists have been doing pretty well over there," I ventured to say.

Hart twisted on his heels, with a curiously effeminate impatience. Then, keeping his hands in his pockets, he began to sway backward and forward. "Oh, yes. But what does it amount to? The English like Mark Twain and Bret Harte; but they only take the most transient and supercilious interest in the rest of us." He stretched out his hands despairingly. "They won't have anything to do with *me*. I've had a half-dozen things done over there and, they've all been failures. However—" Here the dramatist re-assumed his air of Napoleonic reserve. For a long time he did not speak. "Still," he went on finally, "it's a great game, and there's money in it while they stand for you. Only there's no knowing when they'll throw you down."

"You certainly have no reason to despair," I said with a laugh, realising that he was making me appear at my worst, and hating him for it. In my inner consciousness, I was wondering why successful people often have such a depressing effect on others.

"Oh, no," he carelessly agreed. "Some day, when I've made a good big stake, I'm going to shut myself up in a little place in Switzerland for a year and I'm going to try to write one really fine play. I shall forget all about the actresses and the authors and the *charming* people, like the people you are with to-night," he went on contemptuously. "I shall please myself, and," he drew a deep breath, "I suppose I shall have my labour for my pains."

As he spoke the curtain had risen slowly, revealing the dark auditorium. He turned away, as if the sight of those empty seats depressed him. "There's something awful about a theatre," he said. "I love it when it's packed with people. Then it's brilliant, inspiring. But even then I can't help thinking: 'Well, in a short time, these people will all be dispersed, and darkness and loneliness will take their place.'" He shivered, a little too obviously, I thought. "Don't you hate to be alone?" he suddenly asked. "I like to have people about me all the time, and I like colour and noise. I believe I could do my best work in a great factory with the sound of hammers ringing in my ears."

In spite of myself, I followed him into the wings. His talk had a powerful fascination. Perhaps, too, it appealed to my sense of curiosity, associated in some way with mystery. Why should this extremely

casual fellow, this light-and-airy fashion-plate, why should he be able to write plays that drew thousands of people to the theatre every night?

"You must come and see me some time," he said with an obliviousness of Alice that, for a moment or two made me feel like a bachelor. "Come up and take a meal with me. I'm always at home."

I saved my self-respect by merely nodding. I should have hated myself if I had told him to come to see *us*. He seemed not to notice the indifference which I had tried so hard to emphasise; he merely looked vaguely across the stage and remarked: "Oh, here's Lily." He smiled, waiting for the girl to come up. "Lily, I know where you learned to act. You've been a lightning-change artist in the old variety theatres."

Miss Valentine was emphatically drawing on her gloves. She dropped a little curtsy. "Dear master," she said, giving Hart a demure look, "all I know about any art I have learned from you."

Hart glanced from the actress to me. "Isn't it too bad that she can't do things like that when there's an audience out there!" He sighed with despair. "O Lily! if you were n't so self-conscious you might become a great woman some day."

Miss Valentine nodded toward me. "He likes to do that. He's always acting."

Walter Hart threw out one arm and gazed into the flies. "Ah, my dear, I might have made a great tragedian if I'd had a little less sense." His voice dropped into a conversational tone. "Really I was a very fine actor once, or rather, actress. I used to

play the leading-lady rôles in our dramatic club at college."

"Could n't you tell it from the women he puts into his plays?" Miss Valentine exclaimed.

She buttoned the last button of her glove, and she slapped her hands against her long automobile coat. She kept her eyes fixed on the dramatist. For a moment I felt as if I were not present, or, rather, as if I ought to make my presence felt to let them know I was there.

"Don't you want to come with us, Wallie?"

"To sup with those *charming* people?" Hart waved his hand and started up the wings. "I always charge for entertaining society," he exclaimed, drawing up the tails of his overcoat and pirouetting. "Two dollars a seat!" At the door his voice assumed a tone of severity: "Lily, you ought to go home and go to bed. It's ridiculous, your sitting up till three o'clock in the morning!"

"I don't believe you're going home yourself," she retorted.

"Of course I'm not. There are some fellows waiting for me at the club. They're giving me a supper. But, you see, I ain't no lady. Remember, Lily, now that you're so successful, you're a lady."

"Run away," said Miss Valentine, with a wave of her hand.

Hart nodded toward a low white automobile that was rebelliously puffing at the curb-stone. The motor-man touched his cap. "Shall I take you down?"

Miss Valentine shook her head. "I prefer my modest cab. Once a lady, always cautious."

"Well, good-night, dear Lily," Hart said, extending his hand and bending toward the girl.

She allowed him to press the tips of her fingers. "Now don't you dare kiss it," she said.

He turned away, forgetting me, and I helped Miss Valentine into the cab. A moment later, we heard Hart sputtering down the street.

"He's a dear thing, Walter Hart," said Miss Valentine, sinking into a corner. "Only I wish he would n't act all the time. It reminds me too much of work."

CHAPTER VI

THE DIFFICULTIES OF BEING A HERO

OUR cab had turned into Broadway, and through the windows, letting in the warm October air, we could see the crowds in the street and the flaming lights of the restaurants. The theatres were all closed and their brilliancy was dimmed. Miss Valentine watched the spectacle with shining eyes, but she was plainly too tired to speak. Perhaps it was my imagination that made me think the sight of the night life in New York was hateful to her, and that, somehow, her apparently inexhaustible vivacity had been assumed.

Just as I was deciding not to talk, but to let the girl have a few minutes of rest before beginning the business of society again, I was suddenly plunged forward and I found myself scrambling on the floor of the cab.

I realised vaguely that my companion had been hurled forward, too, and that the cab was trembling, as if shaken with electricity. Indistinctly, and as if from afar, I heard the shouts of men, with the thin, shrill cries of women intermingled. Then the cab dashed down Broadway and I knew by some process of reasoning that the driver had been hurled from his box. Our horse plunged wildly between cable-cars

and cabs and automobiles. I tried to seize Miss Valentine, less, I acknowledge, for the purpose of helping her than of steadying myself, and for a few moments we kept clutching at each other and bumping together. The lights in the streets flashed past us, and I was conscious of a deep resentment against those people who, by their frantic waving of arms and by their outcries, were further inflaming our horse. As I thought of the chaos in Herald Square and dreaded what would happen when we reached Thirty-fourth Street, the rocking of the cab ceased, and, for a brief interval, we bowled along quite smoothly. Miss Valentine and I scrambled to the seat and we gasped for breath.

"The horse is running away!" Miss Valentine exclaimed, and, on receiving this information, I had a wild impulse to laugh.

"Don't jump out under any consideration!" I exclaimed.

The girl turned her brown eyes toward me in apparent reproach for my stupidity. They seemed to cover one-half of her face.

At Herald Square it became plain that our arrival had been anticipated and we dashed past Thirty-fourth Street without meeting an obstruction. Then the horse grew wild again, and our career between Thirtieth Street and Twenty-third was so frantically zigzag that, to this day, it makes me dizzy to think of it. Without looking at Miss Valentine, I knew that her face was white and that her lips were tightly pressed together. Again that horrible impulse to laugh seized me. It was accompanied by a powerful

The Difficulties of Being a Hero 75

desire to talk, to yell; but, while the cab kept rocking and whirling, I could think of nothing to say. And yet my mind kept working with an extraordinary rapidity.

As we neared Madison Square one thought kept repeating itself. It was like a puzzle: On reaching Madison Square would that horse have sense enough to turn into Fifth Avenue, where he would have a comparatively free course, on smooth asphalt, or would he prefer Broadway, with its tracks, its long chain of cable-cars, its cobble-stones? In my imagination, I kept seeing a cab, wildly curving again and again from the edges of the tracks.

All the inanimate things that we passed, the big buildings, the sidewalks, the electric-light poles, seemed to have taken on life. They moved with a monstrous and demon-like agility; the electric-light poles possessed a fantastic humour. With an anxiety that related itself to a sickly feeling in the region of the heart, I watched for the approach of Madison Square. As the Hoffman House was about to whirl past us, it suddenly reeled back; then it leaped up and down in the air, and disappeared in a blackness that quickly became luminous with stars. The door of the cab opened; a crowd of faces peered at the door; several arms and hands were stretched toward us, and drew out a limp figure which was strangely unlike Miss Valentine. A moment later I was standing on the sidewalk, feeling as if I had just stepped off a pair of skates, and recalling the inquisitive and amused face of my dentist at home, surrounded with white smoke.

"Well, you had a pretty narrow escape, sir."

Then I partly regained my balance. A group of men were helping Miss Valentine across the street to a drug-store. I had what I can only describe as the ghost of an impulse to follow her; but it faded away. A woman's pitying face roused me to make an effort to walk. But I could only move unsteadily. Some one took me gently by the arm.

"Why, it's Mr. Foster!"

I looked at the speaker. His appearance seemed familiar. The voice, too, I vaguely recognised. "Oh!" I said mechanically. I knew I had seen him somewhere. Then I laughed, not hysterically, but weakly, foolishly, forlornly. I was bitterly deploring my failure to play a noble part, to fulfil the popular ideal of a man. At that moment I was not a man; I was a bundle of distracted nerves. I secretly assured myself that it would be a great comfort to cry for a long time; but I must hide that weakness from all the world, for a moment, at any rate. If I could only keep my mind from working so hard! Really, I had it on the run.

"You'd better let me help you across the street, Mr. Foster," said the man with the curiously familiar and yet unfamiliar voice.

I wondered why he was so respectful. Then I remembered where I had seen him. He had once come to interview me. He was a reporter. I don't know why this realisation should have been followed by an impulse that made me turn to the cab and say: "Is the horse hurt?"

"Oh, no. He's all right. They'll take care of

The Difficulties of Being a Hero 77

him. The driver's probably chasing down Broadway now.

"Oh!" I said. "The driver." I noticed how gentle my voice was. If Alice could hear me, she would weep. I felt myself to be a singularly pathetic figure. And yet an uneasy suspicion came to me that there was something wrong with my crush-hat. It clung irresolutely to my right eyebrow; but my arms were too heavy to straighten it out.

"A glass of whiskey will make you feel all right, Mr. Foster."

I felt a strange irritability because this man kept calling me Mr. Foster. And then, I did n't like the way he was holding my arm. He was wrenching it out of its socket. If I should——

"That's right. Drink it down without stopping."

I gulped several times, with painful regularity, and a warmth slowly spread itself through my body. Miss Valentine, far away, came nearer. She was like a figure in the cinematograph. Bump! There she was.

"Well, you came mighty near!" she said cheerfully.

"Near what?" I asked.

"Near fainting!"

"Did *you* faint?" I whispered, and I listened for the answer as if my fate depended on it.

"Of course, I did. But I always come to in a jiffy."

"Oh, if *you* fainted," I remarked in a tone of concession. How white and glittering that drug-store was! All marble and electric light. And then, of a sudden, with the force of a blow, I recalled that they were waiting for us in the Holland House.

"What will they think?" I said. "They'll be scared to death. Do you suppose they have been waiting all this time?"

Miss Valentine looked alarmed. She gazed at me as one does at an insane man. Then I realised that in the past few moments I had not lived nearly so long as I supposed. It seemed a lifetime since Alice left me at the theatre.

"If you will re-arrange your hat, you won't look quite so dissipated, Mr. Foster," said Miss Valentine, smiling first at the people who had followed us into the place and then at me. I glanced at a mirror and I was startled by the image I saw there, a cadaverous, white-faced young man, unable to hold himself up straight, and evidently having trouble to balance his crush-hat on his head. I re-adjusted the hat and I stood erect.

The reporter turned to a young man who had just entered and they whispered together. "The driver is all right," he explained. "He was just shaken up a bit. Some people who saw him fall followed you in an automobile, and you need n't worry about the cab," he added, smiling. "The policeman will hold the horse till the driver comes down."

I don't know why these words should have made me feel ignoble, but they did.

Miss Valentine glanced apprehensively at the crowd. "Won't it be awful, having to face those people? But we've got to get to the Holland House."

She suddenly turned to the reporter and pressed her hand against her mouth. "But you won't say anything about that, will you, Mr. Leonard? We're

The Difficulties of Being a Hero 79

taking supper with some people—just some friends of ours, you know.”

Leonard smiled. “All right, Miss Valentine,” he said, as if granting her a favour.

I started toward the door, but, as I was about to turn to thank the reporter, Miss Valentine exclaimed: “We must n’t forget to pay our little bill.”

I turned, feeling like an idiot, and a moment later, we escaped by the door leading to Fifth Avenue. A hansom cab slowly approached us, the whip of the driver trailing in the air. The sight of it made Miss Valentine shiver. “Ugh!” she said, letting her hand rest on my arm. “No more cabs for me to-night. I believe I shall have to walk home. Just look around and see if any one is following us. Perhaps we’d better not go straight to the hotel. Let us walk up to Twenty-sixth Street and then turn down toward Fourth Avenue. The air will do me good. I feel just a little,—well, just a little wobbly, and I sha’n’t dare to face all those smart people till I brace up a bit.” She gave my arm a little squeeze. “I’m so glad you are n’t a society person,” she concluded, with a deep sigh.

When we had walked half-way down the block toward Madison Square, Miss Valentine began to tremble. “Now, don’t be frightened. It is n’t anything,” she assured me. “I’m often like this before I go on the stage. You see, the first night and all this excitement. Now let’s walk a little more slowly. Have we really escaped the crowd? I was afraid some of them might follow.”

We kept straight on, and by the time we reached

Lexington Avenue she had stopped trembling. "Perhaps it will be safe to face society now," she said. "I do hope that reporter-man won't say anything about the Holland House. It will be such a bore to drag in the Van Zandts and the others. Not that they'll mind so much. They're used to being in the newspapers. But this is one of the horrid things about the theatrical business." Then she smiled faintly. "Would n't it have been terrible if the rising young author had been killed! And with an actress! How romantic! And what a scandal! What would Mrs. Foster say?"

I was tempted to reply, "She'd say it served me right," but, instead, I remarked, "Mrs. Foster takes a sensible view of everything."

"Ah!" For several moments Miss Valentine was silent. "Does she help you with your writing?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, I read everything to her. She criticises the characters and their clothes and——"

"Does n't she ever get jealous of the women?"

"The women in my stories?" I asked, in astonishment.

Miss Valentine nodded.

"Never. Why should she?"

"I can't think of anything that would be more natural," the actress replied.

Then I became fatuous. "You don't know Mrs. Foster," I said.

"I know that she's a woman," she replied serenely. "And you can't make all your lovely heroines like her."

The Difficulties of Being a Hero 81

"No," I acknowledged. "That would grow monotonous—for the reader."

"It's different with painters, is n't it?" she went on reflectively. "Some of them are always putting their wives into pictures. What does your wife say when you describe an ideal woman that does n't resemble her in the least? Does n't she want to know where you found your model?"

"I don't draw any ideal women," I replied. "I don't believe there are any."

"Oh!" Miss Valentine exclaimed, pretending to be shocked.

"You ought to have allowed me to finish. Real women are much more attractive."

She nodded her head knowingly. "I shall have to talk about that with your wife," she said.

As we approached the Holland House, I noticed that it was half-past twelve. Again I had a sense of incredibility and a realisation of the purely relative existence of time. It seemed as if Alice could not possibly be at the hotel. This thought warned me not to betray agitation on seeing her. Miss Valentine must have been going through a somewhat similar process in her mind, for she said:

"I suppose we must tell them."

"I'll let you break the news."

"I think I'll wait till I've had something to eat." Miss Valentine looked at me sharply. "Well, you're presentable enough. How about me?"

I assured her that it was wonderful, the way she had regained her composure, and we walked boldly

into the dining-room. We found our friends at one of the big tables.

"You got down here pretty quickly!" Mrs. Smith exclaimed, to my amazement.

Alice, seated beside Cosgrave and Monty, fixed her eyes on the actress, and ignored me. She was smiling radiantly and she looked wonderfully pretty. I tried to catch her glance, but she remained apparently oblivious of my presence.

Mrs. Van Zandt had arranged to have me sit between Mrs. Eustace and Mrs. Wainwright Smith, directly opposite Alice. At the moment I did not realise that Alice would overhear every word I said.

"Well, I hope you got on with the great actress?" Mrs. Eustace said under her breath.

"Oh, we got on splendidly," I replied.

"Did you talk about the play you are going to write for her?"

"We had more interesting things to talk about."

For the first time since I took my seat, Alice turned her face toward me. Her eyes were shining feverishly, and there was a look of tension around her mouth that I had never seen before. In spite of myself, I had to look away.

"She is going to be the rage, I'm sure," Mrs. Eustace continued, "and you must cultivate her. I've been talking with Mrs. Smith, and we've made a plan for you."

Mrs. Smith turned to me. "Lily needs some fresh air. So I'm going to take her up on the coach on Monday morning to Ardsley. Teddy Markoe's driving and he wants you to come along, too, with your

The Difficulties of Being a Hero 83

wife. Now you must n't say a word about your work. Your wife says you're a slave; but you must give up your slavery for once. Besides, it's all in the way of business. If I don't get an order for a play for you before we come home, why, I'll give you an order myself, and I'll take the star-part."

I felt my eyes ridiculously filling with tears. I suppose I was still shaken up. Through a mist I looked at Alice, hoping for a sympathetic glance from her. But she sat there like stone, turning from Cosgrave to Monty Dyer to speak a few words and to force her lips into a mechanical smile. I wondered what the matter was.

The waiter had filled my glass with champagne; but for fear of becoming giddy, I had not dared to drink. When the lobster was served, however, and I had eaten, I grew courageous. Miss Valentine, I observed, ate ravenously and was having her glass replenished. A swift glance at Alice's neglected plate confirmed my worst suspicions. A wall of ice seemed to have grown up between us.

Mrs. Wainwright Smith had set the talk going again on the subject of Walter Hart's play. "I do think it's a shame the way he's captured the theatres," she said. "Why, he had four of his old plays going here at one time last winter."

"Well, that's success, is n't it?" said the good-natured Van Zandt, with the business-man's standard of values.

"But they are all so much alike, dearest," said his wife.

"All Walter Hart can do is to make women ridiculous," Mrs. Eustace chimed in.

"That's what he calls being natural," exclaimed Miss Valentine, taking another sip of champagne. I began to be nervous for her, and to wonder if I ought not to tell Mrs. Smith what had happened. The longer we delayed telling, the more I dreaded the explanation.

"A gentleman to speak to Miss Valentine, sir."

We all heard the words addressed by the waiter to Nicholas Van Zandt. In the face of Mrs. Wainwright Smith, resentment of the intrusion was plainly depicted.

"Lily, you ought to teach your adorers not to be so forward."

Miss Valentine remained beautifully at ease. I had never admired her so much. Ignoring Mrs. Smith, she turned to the waiter. "Did the gentleman give his name?" she asked.

"No, miss. But I think he said he was a reporter," the waiter replied. "He wanted to speak to you about the accident, he said."

Miss Valentine's face flushed, and, across the table, I thought I could feel a vibration of alarm in Alice.

"What accident?" Mrs. Smith asked.

"Nothing of the least consequence." Miss Valentine was really superb. Instead of turning to Mrs. Smith, she spoke to us all. She was as casual in manner as Alice can be when she wishes to score one of her finest points. "Our horse grew a little unmanageable as we came down Broadway, and shook us up a bit."

"And you've been hiding that from us all this time, you little wretch!" Mrs. Smith exclaimed.

The Difficulties of Being a Hero 85

"Simply because I knew how nervous you were, dear Mrs. Smith," Miss Valentine sweetly replied.

I did not dare to look at Alice. But from across the table I was conscious that she felt a sense of triumph, resulting from a confirmation of her intuition. Whenever Alice has an intuition confirmed, the consequences are terrible.

Letty Henderson looked as if she were about to burst into tears. Mrs. Van Zandt was pale, and all the men seemed apprehensive. "Shall I go and see the reporter?" Van Zandt asked.

"No, please don't." Miss Valentine's face expressed a polite *ennui*. "There's nothing to be said, and I'm sorry I can't see him myself."

The waiter nodded and left the table.

"Really these actresses are quite spoiled, are n't they?" Mrs. Eustace whispered to me. "Would n't you think she was a little queen sitting up there?"

"Lily, you'll have to come home with me to-night," Mrs. Smith severely remarked, and she rose from her seat. "I see that some one must take care of you."

The others rose in silence and then a curious thing happened: the women at once formed a group around the actress, clamouring for the story of the adventure, and the men gathered around me. We must have made a small sensation in the dining-room. After few moments, Mrs. Smith walked toward me:

"I'm going to take you and your wife home in my carriage," she said, "with Lily. Fortunately, I have a man on the box that I can trust."

I discovered that I had been wondering how I was

to get home with Alice, and I inwardly breathed a sigh of relief. As we were leaving the hotel Teddy followed us to the carriage: "It's still on for Monday, is n't it?"

"Of course it is, you silly boy." Mrs. Smith impatiently waved her hand. "But don't talk about it now!"

Teddy closed the door with a bang, and away we started down Fifth Avenue.

During the drive to our house, Mrs. Smith occupied most of the time in scolding Lily Valentine. Alice and I sat in silence, glancing covertly at each other. As we entered our house it seemed so lonely and forlorn that I almost shivered. It took us an interminable time to drag up the stairs. I opened the door of the apartment and held my back to it as Alice passed in. "Well, my dear," I said, following her into the little hall.

She suddenly faced me, her eyes blazing: "Don't speak to me!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, very well, then," I said, and, turning on the electric-light, I went into the dining-room, changed my coat, and lit my pipe. My literary sense noted that I was going through the movements expressive of peace and content, while my whole being seemed to be wrapped in desolation.

CHAPTER VII

THE SCENARIO IS WRITTEN

FOR a long time I sat without stirring. Not a sound could be heard in the apartment. I wondered if Alice had gone to bed. Then I heard her moving about and, on an impulse, I seized a book and pretended to read. A moment later she entered the room with a rustling sound that told me she had changed her theatre-dress for a loose gown. I put down the book, and I saw at once that Alice had been crying.

"I am sorry," she said, with the calm nobility of the Roman matron.

She sat at some distance from me, letting her elbow rest on the table. It was plain that she expected me to rise to the heights that she had achieved; but I could not think of any words to compete with hers.

Presently her eyes filled with tears. "I think you might be a little kinder," she said, her lips trembling.

Those words made it plain to me that the moment had come for firmness.

"I don't see what you have done to expect kindness from me," I said, and Alice broke out:

"To think that I had to sit up there and smile and pretend I was happy while you were going through all that! And then, when you came into the hotel, I

knew right off that something had happened. And to hide it from me all that time and to have it come out as it did—from her!”

“From *her*,” I repeated. “That child!”

Alice laughed hysterically. “She’s ten times as old as you are—in experience, I mean. You were nothing to her, any more than dozens of other men that she meets, except so far as she could use you.” Alice clasped her hands and pressed them against her breast, as if trying to keep back the flood of emotion that was surging there. “Oh, I think I must be sick,” she lamented. “I’m so wretched, so wretched. Why did n’t you let one of the other men wait for her—one of those bachelors?” she concluded, injecting into her voice the married woman’s scorn for the unmarried man.

I ignored the question. “I am never jealous when men pay you attention.”

Here Alice laughed again. The sound was distressing. “Why, you perfectly hated little Monty because he was polite to me at the Van Zandts’ the other night. And you were furious with Mr. Cosgrave because he wanted to paint my portrait.”

“In future, I will try to appreciate Monty’s superior qualities, and, as for Cosgrave, he may paint as many portraits of you as he likes.”

“He is going to begin on Thursday,” said Alice, becoming quiet all of a sudden.

There was a slight gulping movement in my throat, but I don’t think that Alice detected it.

“Are you going to his studio alone?” I asked, and a little glint appeared in Alice’s eyes.

"I should think you would know better than that," she said, in the tone she always employs when she has the advantage. "Letty Henderson is going with me."

I cannot explain the reason, but I felt as if I had been worsted. I believe that Alice felt so, too, for she rapidly grew more serene. I experienced an inexplicable desire to talk about the accident, though I perceived that Alice's interest had somewhat subsided.

Nevertheless, I gave a complete account of the night's adventure. When I had finished, Alice stoically remarked: "Of course, it will get into the papers."

"Well, it will be a good advertisement," I said, making a dismal effort to be jocose.

"What did you talk about while you were taking that midnight stroll?"

"About you, chiefly."

"H'm!" In the silence that followed I saw that Alice was making a great effort. "To-morrow we will go and call on her."

I nodded, not daring to speak. Alice's hand was resting on the table, and my hand strayed toward it and rested beside it.

"Of course, if all this excitement helps your getting an order for a play, it will be worth the work."

"Of course," I assented, with a curious desire to laugh.

Alice brightened. "If you could have heard them talk at the table about the play. They were just as interested! I could tell that it was something new

for them. They must get terribly bored—especially poor Mrs. Van Zandt.”

“I don’t see how they can help it,” I gloomily agreed.

“And then it was funny, watching the undercurrents.”

“The what?” I asked, bewildered.

“What was going on under the surface. Mr. Cosgrave is carrying on a desperate flirtation with Mrs. Eustace. I had a suspicion of it that night at the Van Zandts’. Now I’m sure.”

“He’ll never get her.”

Alice shrugged her shoulders. “She’s only amusing herself. And she’s piqued because he seems so indifferent. It’s one of those horrid enemy-flirtations.”

“What are you talking about?”

Alice smiled with conscious wisdom.

“Don’t you know how some people flirt together just to make each other unhappy?”

“I never heard of such a thing.”

“Well, dearest, it’s time you learned. Isn’t it strange the way writers go on saying the same old things about love?”

“There are n’t so many things to be said. I imagine that the ways of lovers are more or less alike all the world over.”

“Perhaps.” Alice gazed into space. “I can understand why Mrs. Eustace has had so much trouble in her life. Isn’t it awful to have the kind of nature that forces you to rush into danger all the time; that makes you do things that are sure to end in unhappiness?”

"You talk like a Greek tragedy," I said impatiently.

"But I feel more sorry for Letty Henderson," said Alice, with the absent look designed to indicate the indifference of superiority.

"Now why should you feel sorry for that extremely pretty and amiable girl?"

"Because she's having her tragedy too."

I laughed aloud. "What's her tragedy?"

"I suspect that Teddy is."

"You mean that she's in love with him and he never looks at her, I suppose."

"That's as accurate as most of your guesses are, Ned."

Alice rose, yawning. "It's past two o'clock. Think how cross you'll be in the morning."

"Well, it's Sunday. I sha'n't get up till noon."

The next morning I woke at nine. Alice was already up and busy in the dining-room. I called to her, and a moment later I heard the sound of her step outside.

"Have you seen the papers?" I asked. Alice leaned against the door, looking wonderfully fresh and pretty in her pink shirt-waist.

"I've seen one paper," she replied indifferently.

"Anything about the accident?"

"Not a word."

She turned away and, though I could not see her, I knew that she was laughing.

"How about the play?" I called out.

"It's one of Bailey's fiercest roasts," Alice replied.

I sat up in bed. "Let me see it," I said, brushing back my hair with both hands. I turned to the page

where the reviews of the drama usually appeared. As I read, Alice stood by the bedside in silence.

When I had finished, I let the sheet drop on the floor, and I gasped aloud.

Alice smiled faintly. "Won't Walter Hart have a lovely time when he sees that?"

"Well, it's true enough. But what's the use of being so brutal?"

"I suppose people have to exercise their faculties," Alice said philosophically. "Those who have amiable dispositions have to go on expressing amiability. That's one reason why they are so tiresome," she interjected. "And if they are brutes, they have to be brutal. And, of course, a critic has especially good opportunities to show just what he is. But it is mean of him to treat Miss Valentine so. The idea of his saying that she sets up to be a great actress! She knows perfectly well what her limitations are. She goes out and she acts exactly as she does off the stage."

"Yes, it's a success of personality," I acknowledged. "But, in spite of what Bailey says, the piece can't help being a go. He merely represents the literary point of view," I said, with the superiority I always feel when I disparage people and things literary.

Alice gave my remark more consideration than it really deserved. "Sometimes the literary point of view coincides with the popular point of view. Now, as Bailey says, there is something decadent in all of Walter Hart's writing. That may appeal to sophisticated New York audiences; but it is n't likely to be accepted out of town."

"True," I assented, somewhat astonished by Alice's reasoning. Now I know a great many more facts than Alice does; but she makes more deductions than I do. At times her facts have a way of shaping themselves into the most extraordinarily significant combinations.

"So many things succeed here and then fail on the road," Alice went on.

I waited, feeling sure that she was leading somewhere.

"If the piece does n't go on the road, Miss Valentine will have to put on another play, and she'll have to put it on in a hurry."

"They may keep the thing in New York all winter," I said, merely to give Alice a new obstacle to overcome.

"But they almost never do that—even with the big successes. I heard Miss Valentine say last night that it was awfully hard to make money in New York. She said that nearly all the money was made on the road."

"Alice," I said, "when I become a great playwright, I'll make you my business-manager."

"Well, you'd better hurry up and get to work," Alice retorted, walking out of the room. "Your bath is ready for you," she called out, through the open door.

Alice's words, together with the exhilaration of the bath, caused me to dress quickly. I felt a strong impulse to go straight to my desk and to begin work at once on the scenario of my play. But breakfast was too tempting, and I took my place at the table.

Alice watched me with the indulgent and amused smile which the sight of my eating always inspires in her. The more I eat, the more cheerful she grows; sometimes, the consciousness of the duty of indulging her in this regard almost takes away my appetite. This morning the coffee seemed particularly golden and aromatic and, when I had paid it a compliment, Alice said:

"I don't think that it varies much from day to day. You happen to be unusually good-natured this morning. You contribute more to the coffee, as it were."

"Oh, this morning," I cried aloud, "I am the greatest author that ever lived. I could give Shakespeare cards and spades."

"Hush!" Alice whispered. "Mary will be alarmed about you. She thinks you're queer enough already."

When I had finished eating, I thought of those other newspapers, containing accounts of the accident. I must go out and get them. "I'll be back in a few minutes," I said to Alice, taking my hat and starting for the door. I knew that no further explanation was necessary. At the news-stand, I astonished the man by asking for every New York paper except *The Sentinel*.

"You must have been making a speech, sir," he said facetiously. Then he proceeded to load me up. My arms were literally full. With the foolish idea of eluding observation, I ran all the way back.

Alice viewed me from head to foot, with a disgusted expression on her face. "And yet they say that women are vain," she said, bending forward to pick up one of the papers.

I knew enough about the methods of newspapers to surmise that the references to our little adventure would probably be on one of the first pages. Long before the runaway took place, in some cases two or three days, the supplements had gone to press. So I rapidly glanced over the news-columns. In one paper I could find nothing about our experience; in another, I read a brief paragraph in which it was recorded that Miss Valentine, accompanied by a "young man," had been badly shaken up by the frantic dashing of her cab down Broadway, but had escaped uninjured. The reporter had apparently been indifferent to the fate of the young man. The third paper gave a few lines to the episode, concluding with the words, "Miss Valentine was accompanied by Mr. Walter Hart, the author of the play in which she had just made her first appearance."

Alice, who had been sitting beside me as I read, must have been studying my face. "Let me see," she said. When she had finished reading, she shrugged her shoulders. "After all, it was n't so much, was it?" she said disparagingly.

"You might feel different if you'd had the experience yourself," I answered, and for the next few minutes I glanced rapidly over the notices of the production the night before. I knew that Alice suspected I was disappointed, and I had to emphasise my indifference. Nearly all of the papers praised Miss Valentine, and a few praised the play, but with reservations; several of the critics, however, were as severe with Walter Hart as *The Sentinel* had been, and two of them referred to his patronising speech.

For a few moments we talked about the great play I was to write for Lily Valentine, and as Alice left the room I turned to my desk in a fine glow of enthusiasm. Even the ringing of the bells on a dozen churches did not disturb me; they actually seemed to blend into my mood. I felt strangely happy. I congratulated myself on being in New York in the very heart of things. So many men that I knew, men far cleverer than I, were buried in small towns and sentenced for life to petty interests and cares. I rapidly thought out the chief episodes in *Francesca Bayne*. Some of those that I liked best, I perceived, could not be acted on the stage. At first, I thought they might be indirectly introduced by means of description; but no, that would be a mistake of policy. I must let the action develop itself before the audience. So many plays had failed because the most interesting of the incidents took place off the stage. For a long time I sat holding my head in my hands. Outside, Alice was moving about on tiptoe. The great point, I kept saying to myself, was to have a fine climax to each act. And I must be careful not to have more than four acts. Five-act plays, unless they were melodramas, had gone completely out of fashion. And then, I must keep the action lively by means of short, swiftly moving scenes. The first act must be all comedy and sentiment; but the interest must be established as soon as possible after the first ten minutes, when people would still keep coming in and the ushers would be slapping down seats. Of course, during those ten minutes the star must not be on the stage. Long before she made her en-

trance, the audience ought to be comfortably settled and absorbed, but alert for the appearance of the heroine.

At this point, I began to wonder how any one had ever undertaken to write a play, or, having made a beginning, had succeeded in reaching the end. And yet, when I saw plays produced, plays that were successful, too, it seemed as if they must have been easy to write. I felt a new respect for Walter Hart, and a vague surprise that neither in his face nor in his manner did he betray that he had passed so often through the ordeal just beginning for me. I drew a breath that seemed to inflate me from my neck to my feet, and I exhaled it in a long sigh. I had an impulse to call in Alice and explain to her that, for me, the art of play-writing was impossible, and that we must give up the thought of ever occupying a house and accept our destiny as life-dwellers in a flat. On reflection, however, I saw that this course would place me at a hideous disadvantage in Alice's eyes, and I forced my mind to resume work on that plot again. Suddenly, as if by an influence wholly outside myself, I conceived the outline of a plan for the first act. What could be more simple? What could be more delightful? Why, of course, it was just the thing! I sketched it out quickly. The entrance on the horse! Why had n't I thought of that before? It would be daring and original, and Miss Valentine would look charming in her riding-habit. I saw the hero leap from his horse to assist her, and I saw Lily Valentine refuse his help and bound from the saddle to the ground, while the audience smiled and

applauded so long that she had to bow again and again. Instantly, I was tempted to stop writing and to count up my royalties; but I resisted, and I wrote on till the scenario for the act was completed. The last scene at the climax, just before the hero went away,—that would give just the faintest touch of pathos, all the more effective because everything else in the act would be light and fantastic.

When I had finished writing I could hardly keep from shouting for joy. Then I perceived that I had written out the scheme for that first act before planning the other acts. Now, after finishing the scenario, I might have to go back and do the first act all over again. I resolved, however, not to let myself be cast down, and I dimly realised that I had been hoping to be able to go to Alice and tell her that the whole scenario was finished. I must get the thing done before luncheon. In the afternoon, when we went to call on Miss Valentine, that is, if Alice approved, we might tell the actress that the scenario was ready. For the next fifteen minutes I sat almost motionless. There were episodes that could go into that second act, but somehow— Again the mysterious influence from outside prompted me, providing exactly the means I needed to estrange the two lovers, and it gave me my climax for the act. In the third act, I should have to think up some expedient for uniting the lovers and reaching the happy ending. But that proved to be easy and with elation I wrote out the rest of the scenario, finding, as I nearly always do, that as I went on new ideas kept coming. I did not stop writing until I had reached the end, and then,

leaping from my seat, I threw up both arms into the air, and I cried aloud "Hurrah!"

Alice walked slowly toward the door, and in the distance, across the dining-room, I could see the alarmed face of Mary, peering at me.

"What is it?" said Alice, in a tone that conveyed a rebuke.

Conscious of Mary's observing eye, I replied in a subdued voice: "I've written the scenario." I think that Mary must have seen that I was observing her, for at this point her exceedingly irregular features vanished. My enthusiasm at once returned. "It has written itself, Alice!" I exclaimed, but keeping my voice subdued, for fear of seeing that disrespectful Irish face again. "It's just the thing for Lily Valentine. Three acts, too. Oh, it came out wonderfully!"

"Read it to me."

In face of her imperturbability, I felt my faith in the scenario waning; but by sheer force of will I retained my confident manner. When I had finished, I said, "Well?"

"All good but the last act," Alice promptly answered.

"What's the matter with the last act?"

"There's nothing interesting in it."

"Don't you call the reunion of the lovers interesting?"

"Oh, that's a mere detail. The audience knows the lovers are going to be reunited anyway. The process ought to be more complicated."

"Well, I think it's a pleasant, pictorial act," I

insisted, lamely, feeling a disappointment the more poignant because of my joy of a short time before.

"You'll think of more things to put in, dear Ned," Alice said with patronising encouragement.

Now there are times when I like comfort, and there are other times when I resent it. "I believe that Lily Valentine will like that act," I insisted. "It gives her a chance to do some pretty work."

"She'd be awful in it," Alice serenely remarked. "Having nothing to do but to go mooning about the stage in those first scenes will make her dreadfully silly and affected."

"Oh, well—" I turned away, hurt, instinctively glancing across the dining-room; but, fortunately, Mary's grotesque face was not in sight; if it had been, I believe I should have thrown something at it.

At this moment the door-bell rang. Alice and I looked at each other with alarm in our faces; we at once became united in spirit against possible invasion.

"Have you invited any one to lunch?" I said in a whisper.

Alice shook her head.

"What time is it?"

"One o'clock." In response to my thought Alice added significantly: "Nothing but cold meat and lettuce for lunch."

Mary was ploughing through the room. Ploughing is the only word that describes her locomotion. To see her walk invariably makes me think of people at summer-resorts coming out of the salt-water and brushing back their wet hair.

"Never mind, Mary," said Alice, with the awfully

pleasant lilt in her voice that she employs with no one but domestics and small children. She rose and started for the door.

I listened anxiously.

"Why, Miss Henderson!"

"How do you do, Mrs. Foster?"

Then I heard the usual feminine osculation and laughter. "What simple things amuse women!" I reflected, as Miss Henderson passed the door and entered the living-room.

"The dear little place!" Miss Henderson said, in the curious gasping manner that I had noticed before but somehow had not realised in my consciousness. "Oh!" she said in a little cry of rapture, which made me wonder what could have occasioned it.

"Yes, we do think we were lucky to have found these old pieces," Alice replied. "Ned likes to browse round the shops in Fourth Avenue and pick up things." Here I listened intently, expecting Alice to adopt the cooing tone which she uses in addressing me before guests. But she went on unconcernedly. "Have you been at church?"

"Yes, we go to St. Philip's on Second Avenue. Father has always gone there, because his father went, and, I believe, his grandfather too. It's awfully stuffy and musty; but I have to please father. He drove home with mother, and I told them I was going down to my cousin's for lunch, Bessie Turner's on Ninth Street. And, as I was passing, I could n't resist the temptation to come and see you."

"That's very nice of you," Alice exclaimed, with the ring of sincerity in her voice.

"I've wanted so much to know you, Mrs. Foster, to know you really, not as one knows so many people here in New York."

"Well, I'm not hard to know," said Alice, with the frank laughter that always renews in me the realisation of how good and generous she is. If I had half-unconsciously feared that she might snub this girl for calling on her so unceremoniously, I repented my injustice.

"But you must have a great many people coming to see you," said Letty Henderson.

"Oh, no. A few literary people. That's about all."

"It must be such a privilege to know them," the girl replied in a wistful tone that made me feel like laughing aloud. I suppose I ought not to have gone on listening; but I simply could n't help it. I made it clear to myself that I was doing wrong, and then I went on doing it quite comfortably.

"I do enjoy them," Alice said. "There's something interesting about all of them."

Here I wanted to get up and shout. This was a good one on Alice after the way she had talked to *me* about writers. Then I reflected that she knew perfectly well I was taking in every word she said, and, in the light of that reflection, the joke did not please me quite so much.

"Oh, I think that all people who do things are interesting," Miss Henderson went on. "Most of the people I see do nothing worth speaking of, and it is so tiresome to have them talking about Bridge all the time."

"Yes, there are n't many new things to be said on the subject," Alice agreed.

"How interested you must be in your husband's writing!" Miss Henderson went on, and I divined that the poor girl, in spite of Alice's cordiality, was growing embarrassed. She had perceived that the talk was becoming arid. "Does he discuss it with you much?"

"All the time." The response was so swift that I knew it was primarily intended for my ears.

"Of course, you must be the greatest help to him."

"Oh, I don't know about *that*," Alice exclaimed.

"By your sympathy, I mean. I could see that he was a man that needed sympathy. I suppose all men of genius do. I suppose they could n't do their work without it."

I covered my face with my hands, and I jarred the desk with my laughter. I believe that Alice realised that things were n't going quite her way, for at that instant she said:

"Ned is in the apartment somewhere. It won't take me very long to find him."

I precipitately retreated and Alice found me in the bedroom.

"She's come for some purpose," she said. "I can't quite imagine what it is. But I shall have to ask her to stay for luncheon."

"Why?" I gasped, incredulously.

"Because she has explained to me that she wants to stay."

"What?" I said, in a tense whisper. "Why, I've heard everything you have said to each other."

"When she explained that she was going to her cousin's to lunch, she meant that if I'd ask her to lunch here she'd stay. If I don't ask her, she'll go away without letting me know what she came for."

"Whew!"

"Now come out," Alice commanded, "and talk to her while I go and have some extra things put on the table."

"I don't see why we should have any more things than we intended to have," I said resolutely. If there is anything I hate in the world, it is providing extra things for guests. It spoils hospitality.

I was prepared to discuss this issue; but Alice made further talk impossible by walking straight back to her caller.

"Ned is just finishing the scenario of a play," she said, "and it's perfectly splendid. He's done a good day's work already." Then Alice added apologetically: "He usually does n't work Sundays; but to-day he was so enthusiastic over the idea of writing a play for Miss Valentine that he simply had to do it."

"Oh," the girl exclaimed, just as I entered the room, "how I should like to hear it!" Then she turned to me and offered her hand.

"Perhaps he'll read it to you," said Alice.

Miss Henderson's pretty blond face became luminous. "If he only would!"

"He'll read it if you'll stay and lunch with us," said Alice. "You will stay, won't you? Your cousin can get along without you for once," she pleaded.

"Oh, Bessie does n't know I am coming," said Miss

Henderson, with perfect innocence shining out of her blue eyes. Really, I reflected, life—that is, feminine life—was altogether too complex for me.

“Then you must stay here, though I can’t promise you much of a luncheon. I ’ll go now and attend to things.”

“Do let me go and help you,” Miss Henderson said eagerly, and in Alice’s eyes I read the consciousness that our guest thought we had no maid. I wondered what Alice would do.

“Come along, then. But first you must take your things off. Here, we ’ll go into the other room.”

They walked out like two schoolgirls, each clasping the other’s waist, and leaving me standing in the middle of the room. I made the reflection, as I have often done, that women are really much more interested in one another than they are in men. I could hear those two girls chattering away furiously, as if they had known each other all their lives and had met after an absence of years. A few minutes later, Miss Henderson, introduced by Alice, was busying herself about the kitchen and joking with the formidable Mary.

On Sundays we usually lunched at half-past one; but on this occasion it was nearly quarter-past two when we sat down. Over the question as to whether we should lunch or dine at noon on Sunday we had already had a long struggle with Mary, and, by granting to her extraordinary concessions in the way of afternoons out, we had triumphed. So the appearance of an unexpected guest at this time might seriously affect our diplomatic relations. As soon as

I walked into the dining-room, however, and saw Mary, I knew that Miss Henderson had conquered her affections. When she came wallowing into the room, converting the air into salt-water, I perceived that Alice had drawn on our Sunday-night dinner in order to eke out this meal and to preserve our credit with our guest. Now, on Sunday nights we usually have tomato bisque, my favorite soup, and, as I passed Alice her plate, she gave me one of her most quizzical glances. Of course, Miss Henderson praised the soup, as well she might. I don't believe that Delmonico or Sherry can make such soup as Mary makes under Alice's supervision. I have often told Alice that in case I died she could earn a fortune by putting her soup on the market. After the soup, we had chicken and creamed potatoes, and our meal closed with toasted crackers, Roquefort cheese, and coffee.

We lingered for a long time over the crackers and cheese and coffee. "Oh, I don't think that I have ever enjoyed a meal so much!" said Miss Henderson. "Everything has been so good, and it's such a relief not to have too many things."

I resisted the temptation to exchange glances with Alice.

"How you would love our every-day lunches!" I said maliciously. "We often make a whole meal of Irish stew."

Miss Henderson laughed in a way plainly meant to show Alice that she thought I was delightfully original and witty. "I love Irish stew, too," she said bravely.

Alice displayed a serenity worthy of a dowager-duchess. "Ned perfectly hates it," she said. "He pretends that he does n't care what we have to eat; but if I don't have exactly what he wants, he 's ready to tear the house down."

I tried not to gasp, and, before I could speak, Alice went on, placing her napkin on the table. "Let us go into the other room. Now, Ned, you must n't take out that horrid pipe. But you *may* smoke a cigar."

"Oh, do let him have his pipe," Miss Henderson pleaded.

"Don't mind what Alice says, Miss Henderson. It 's a beautiful pipe."

By her manner Alice acquiesced, and, as I filled the pipe, I reflected that we were giving this little New York Miss what she believed to be a taste of real Bohemian life. The thought made me smile faintly.

"Ned 's thinking of his comedy. Bring out the scenario and read it aloud, Ned."

Now, honestly, if there 's anything that I hate, it is reading aloud my things to any one but Alice. I had hoped that they had forgotten about that reading. However, after I got the pipe well going, I put a good face on the matter and I read. When I had finished, Miss Henderson exclaimed:

"It seems to me perfectly wonderful! Of course, Miss Valentine will be delighted to get it." She appealed to Alice. "Don't you think it is lovely, Mrs. Foster?"

When Alice had given her opinion, this time frankly, Miss Henderson looked disappointed. "But their meeting in the moonlight—it 's so romantic."

"It seems ridiculous to me," Alice remarked, with a smile.

"Does it really?" Miss Henderson clasped her hands. "I suppose I am no judge. I really don't know much."

Then she hesitated. Alice and I saw that she had something on her mind but was afraid to say it. We gave her time.

"Do you know what I thought you were going to do?" she said, falteringly, turning to me. "I thought that when the hero, Desmond, came back, in the last act, you were going to arrange the situation so that he would think Francesca was going to marry the other one, Henshaw, you know, the horrid one."

We both kept our eyes fixed on the girl. We had a premonition that something was coming.

"Well, then—" Miss Henderson grew more embarrassed on perceiving our interest, apparently feeling that she was sure to disappoint us. "You see, I thought that his mistake would make him break out."

"His feeling sure that he had lost her?" I said breathlessly.

Miss Henderson nodded.

"He's been so—so reticent before. But they say—they—" Here Miss Henderson became too confused to go on, and Alice rushed to her rescue.

"The most reticent people sometimes speak out when it's too late!" Alice cried in a manner that for her was extraordinarily dramatic. I sub-consciously resolved to mimic it later.

Miss Henderson looked intensely grateful for the help. "That's exactly what I mean," she said.

I glanced with delight from Alice to our guest and then back to Alice.

"Why did n't I think of that before?" I said.

Miss Henderson's face beamed with happiness. "Do you really like the idea?" she incredulously asked.

"Like it?" I echoed. "You have saved the act! You've saved the play!"

Miss Henderson's face grew scarlet. "You see," she said, talking to cover her embarrassment, "Francesca would—she would admire Desmond all the more—for——"

"For showing that he had some spirit," I almost shouted. "Of course! Of course! I can make a stunning scene out of that."

Alice smiled compassionately. "Oh, these vain authors!"

"It's all your work, Miss Henderson. We'll divide the royalties."

Here the girl became plainly alarmed. She did not even dare to give my foolish little joke its proper recognition. "I'll be so pleased if it helps," she said, her voice trembling. Then she suddenly asked, "When are you going to read it to Miss Valentine?"

Alice explained that we were to call on the actress that afternoon and Miss Henderson rose.

But Alice would not let her go. Instead, she conveyed to me by her manner that I was to withdraw for an interval. So, making work an excuse, I left the room. For an hour I could hear those two young women whispering like conspirators. Meanwhile, I worked on the new version of the third act. In my

enthusiasm I wrote bits of dialogue for the scene that Miss Henderson had suggested. I could hardly keep from rushing into the next room and reading what I had written; but I realised that such a proceeding would seem childish. Before Miss Henderson I must maintain a proper dignity. At last, by the increasing volume of the conspiring voices I knew the two girls had risen from their seats and were preparing to separate. Alice presently called me.

When I explained how I had been occupying the time, Miss Henderson cried: "Oh, I do hope the piece will be a great success!"

"Ah, you know the adage in the theatrical business: 'Any one can write a play, but it takes a genius to get one produced.'"

As Miss Henderson left the house she embraced Alice fervently:

"Good-bye, dear Alice," she said.

"Good-bye, Letty dear."

I restrained my astonishment till the door had closed behind the girl. Then, generously oblivious of my own affairs, I said: "Explain."

Alice walked into the den. "What?" she asked, with a lovely representation of innocence.

"This outburst of affection and familiarity. I know it was n't on account of Society's contribution to Dramatic Literature."

"Oh, that!"

"Well?"

"It's just what I thought. It's about Teddy."

"What's Teddy to us?"

"She's afraid of him. She wants me to keep near

her to-morrow. She dreads going to Ardsley with him."

"What in the deuce does she go for then?"

"Her mother won't let her refuse."

"And she wants you for a watch-dog. Is that all she came here for?"

"Ah, my dear Ned," Alice remarked patiently, "you don't understand. She's reaching out for help, poor girl."

"And she's found you," I sarcastically added.

"She's reaching out to me because—well, I suppose because I'm different from a good many of the women she knows, and because she trusts me. She's taken a fancy to me."

"What's the matter with Teddy?"

"She does n't like him—and—and he's wicked."

"How can any one be wicked who is so rich as he is?"

"Ned, you are very tiresome when you try to be cynical."

"Are n't the Hendersons rich?"

"Letty says her father used to be. Now they have a dreadful time keeping up."

"What does the old man do?"

"Wall Street—but he's unlucky."

"And the old lady is manœuvring to catch Teddy?"

"That's not a nice way of expressing it, Ned. But it's somewhere near the truth."

"Ah, I'm a deep observer."

"Yes, Ned dear, you can see anything that is pointed out to you."

"Well, don't you think you are rather rash?"

"How?"

"Interfering."

"I'm not interfering. Only I can't turn away from the poor child when she needs some one to confide in."

"You are taking a big contract on your hands, my dear."

"What would you have me do—refuse my sympathy?"

Alice came toward me and smiled up into my face. "Now I'll listen to the amended scenario. I want to hear it all over again. Was n't it lovely her coming in to-day? It seems like Providence. And, before I forget, there's some tomato bisque left for dinner," she said.

"Oh, that throws an entirely different light on the matter!" I exclaimed.

CHAPTER VIII

WE MEET MISS VALENTINE'S MANAGER

LETTY HENDERSON'S visit offered many points of departure and topics for comment. Unfortunately, however, we found that if we were to call on Lily Valentine that afternoon we should do well to begin preparation at once.

"You know it takes you ages to get into your frock coat," Alice said warningly.

I groaned. Why I hate to assume afternoon magnificence I cannot tell. Arrayed and in public I feel a self-complacency and a peace of mind that no other costume can confer on me. Indeed, on such occasions, I seem to have grown two inches taller.

Once in the street, the clear, cold atmosphere of the perfect autumn day inspired us to walk rapidly. Cold weather always makes me feel happy: it fairly lifts me to another plane; it often brings back to my mind bits of poetry that I supposed I had forgotten: sometimes it inspires me with the desire to sing, right in the street, too. When I get into one of these moods of elation Alice usually adopts her reproving manner, though I know that she responds to them and enjoys them with me.

At Fifth Avenue we found an enormous crowd, nearly all assembled on one side of the street. "Let

us walk on the other side," said Alice, "where we can see the people—unless—" she added carelessly, "unless you insist on being a part of the show."

"We'll sacrifice the pictorial effect," I agreed, keeping to the left.

"It reminds me of the *Champs Élysées*," Alice remarked, making a reference to the two years she lived abroad which, out of respect for my feelings, is rare. She knows how I long to get over there and how out of it I feel when people discuss in my presence their European experiences. I have been put down so often by people who have been abroad. Sometimes I think I will go to Europe even if I have to take the first steamer back, just to be able to say I have been there.

"Only in place of the fat and greasy middle-aged Frenchmen with their funny plug-hats and with their families tagging behind them," Alice went on, "they nearly all look young and dapper."

"Yes," I assented, surveying the surging mass, "even those who are n't young have something youthful about them, perhaps, as you say, because they are so dapper. Only you must n't say 'plug-hats,' dearest. I'm afraid you've caught that from me."

"What shall I say?" Alice asked.

"Well, it's very hard to know," I replied, with a humility for which I gave myself full credit. "*Silk-hat* is tabooed and *top-hat* sounds affected. In fact I make it a rule in my writing never to mention the article."

"I should think you'd be afraid of refining your-

We Meet Miss Valentine's Manager 115

self out of the vocabulary. Your list of words to be avoided grows larger every day. If you don't look out, you 'll have to write in the sign language."

"I suppose that social prejudice has crept into that, too," I said with a sigh. "What a fearful slavery the refinements of civilisation are! They merely multiply the channels of pain. Did you notice in Walter Hart's play the reference one of the characters made to a *Prince Albert* coat? I nearly fainted away."

"Well, it's a great thing to have the courage of your vulgarity. I really think that is one reason why Walter Hart is so successful."

"But when one is naturally refined, it is impossible to have that sort of courage, dearest," I retorted, and I would have gone on in this vein if I had not become aware that Alice had stopped listening. There are moments when Alice suddenly throws up barriers between us, invisible to the naked eye, but plain enough to the trained married consciousness.

"Everybody looks so prosperous in New York," she said. "And in Fifth Avenue, on a Sunday afternoon, they all seem like millionaires."

At that moment a fear, developed by my observation of those smart, handsome young men who were walking so furiously down the avenue, as if about to keep important engagements, shaped itself into a conviction. "Ah!" I said in a shocked voice.

"What?" said Alice, looking swiftly about in search of the cause of my exclamation.

"My frock-coat is n't right."

Alice surveyed it critically.

"What 's the matter with it?"

"It 's at least three inches too short."

"What of it? Who 'd notice?"

"Everybody would notice—everybody who knows. Besides, the consciousness of it detracts from my *aplomb*."

Then Alice delivered a magnificent shot. "It 's in keeping with my gown."

"I was just thinking that of all the gowns——"

"It 's two years old."

"Exactly the age of my frock-coat," I pathetically remarked. "After all," I went on, "age is a purely relative thing, is n't it? Now——"

"Every woman knows that," Alice interrupted. "That 's one reason why so many women are crazy to marry early. An unmarried woman is old at twenty-five. A woman who loses her husband at forty is considered a young widow."

Our interest in the crowd did not deter us from observing the people in the landaus and hansom-cabs that dashed past us; but we agreed that, from our exalted social point of view, the people who thus exploited themselves were not of a quality that we could approve. Among them were many women of a hectic radiance, driving alone or in twos, their millinery floating ostentatiously in the air, and their eyes returning the gaze of the pedestrians with a glittering coldness. These women we did not discuss. There are subjects that Alice and I never mention.

As we turned into Lily Valentine's street, I could not resist the impulse to give Alice's gloved hand a faint pressure. It seemed years since the little excite-

We Meet Miss Valentine's Manager 117

ment and the misunderstanding of the night before, and I had a prophetic feeling that such a cloud, no matter how slight, could never come between us again. With confidence we walked up the steep brown-stone steps in the long ugly block of brick houses and I pressed the electric bell. As the maid opened the door we saw Miss Valentine running down the front stairs.

"Well!" the actress exclaimed, "is n't this wonderful?" and I noticed that the maid looked surprised.

Miss Valentine gave both hands to Alice in what struck me as a rather theatrical welcome. "Mr. Holbrook, my manager, is here. He went out to his country-place in Jersey after the performance last night and he only read about the accident this noon. So he must have come straight up on a train. I suppose he 's scared blue. He 's in there. I have n't seen him yet. Oh, I 'm so glad you 've come. Mr. Foster, you look as if you 'd grown six inches. Are you wearing high-heeled shoes?"

I was rather dazzled by this rapid firing; but not too dazzled to perceive that Miss Valentine wore an extraordinarily beautiful costume. It was loose and flowing and it seemed to be made of some filmy material, white with little blue and white flowers worked in it. I believe that she knew that I was observing the dress, for she said: "I 'm supposed to be an invalid. That is, I 've been lying down since I got back from Mrs. Smith's, and I have n't seen a soul though a lot of people have been here. Mrs. Smith would n't let me get up till twelve o'clock, the silly old thing. I believe she kept me in bed so that she could lecture me about the proper way to take care

of my health. Now do come in and meet the great manager."

We passed through the hall to the library at the back of the house. It was lined with low bookcases, and the walls, covered with red burlap, were decorated with old prints and with photographs of theatrical celebrities. In one corner stood a young man with an exceedingly good-natured face and a slim figure, somewhat extravagantly dressed.

"Ah, there you are!" exclaimed Miss Valentine, with the air of quoting from a play.

"So you 're alive!" said the manager, walking forward into the light from one of the windows, and then I perceived, with some relief, that he was not so very young, after all. I confess that I dislike meeting successful men who are younger than myself. I suppose that is a low trait. I wonder if other men have it, and if they are always comparing men's ages with their own.

When we had been introduced, Miss Valentine waved her arm toward me.

"This is the young man who was in the cab with me," she explained.

"Then it was n't Hart?" the manager asked, plainly with relief.

"Thank Heavens, no! That's just about as accurate as reporters usually are. After the work Walter's been doing at rehearsals, an experience like that might have given him nervous prostration. Just reading that he had been in the runaway nearly threw him into a fit. He's the most sympathetic thing, poor Walter," Miss Valentine rattled on, turn-

We Meet Miss Valentine's Manager 119

ing to Alice. "I've been talking to him over the 'phone."

"Well, naturally," said Holbrook with his beaming smile, "Walter does n't want his royalties shut off. We're not putting in an understudy in this piece."

"He said he'd come down to see me if he were n't an invalid."

"Too much supper last night, I suppose," said Holbrook, radiating again. He seemed to extract amusement out of everything.

"No, he's got one of his colds, poor dear. The real trouble is that Walter's been killing himself with work. I told him that, as he could n't come to see me, I'd go to see him. Suppose we all go," she said, including Alice and me in her glance.

Holbrook broke into a loud laugh. To him life seemed to be a perpetual joke. "Lily, you're a wonder," he said. "I expected to find you laid up in bed, with a half-dozen doctors around you, and here you are ready to go chasing around town as if nothing had happened."

"Well, it's excitement that keeps me alive," said Miss Valentine. Then she seemed to become aware that she had not been giving us sufficient attention, and she turned to speak to Alice.

Holbrook, however, was not going to be pushed out of the game like that. "And after all those notices, too!" he said with a roar.

I reflected with astonishment that those notices might cost him thousands of dollars. And yet, he could be merry over them. Such a sense of humour must be a fortune in itself.

Our Best Society

"Were n't they awful?" Miss Valentine echoed. "Mrs. Smith did n't want to let me read them," she said, addressing Alice. "So, of course, I knew they must be roasts, and I told her if she did n't have them sent up, I'd get out of bed and go out and bring them myself." She turned toward the manager again and her face instantly reflected the radiance of his smile. "Do you think we can make 'em take it?" she asked, as if speaking of a medicine.

"Oh, yes," he replied easily. "They'll take anything from Hart nowadays."

"But on the road," Miss Valentine insisted, and, involuntarily, I exchanged glances with Alice.

Holbrook nodded his head with unshaken confidence. "Oh, it'll hit 'em hard on the road." It was doubtless his optimism that made him appear so youthful. At moments he seemed twenty-five; but he must have been at least forty. "The jays will like the high life, and the dressing, and all that."

The shock of hearing the expression *the high life* made me glance at Alice again, but she was keeping her eyes resolutely fixed on the actress.

"Well, I don't know," Lily Valentine pensively remarked, holding two fingers at her lips. Then she suddenly faced me. "Have you thought of your scenario?" she said.

"Oh, yes, I've *thought* of it," I replied, somewhat ill at ease, owing to my instinctive dishonesty in presence of Alice.

Nevertheless, Alice came to my rescue. "He's thought of nothing else all day long."

"We've had three heads working on it," I re-

We Meet Miss Valentine's Manager 121

marked, boldly resisting the temptation not to give Letty Henderson credit. If I did not mention Miss Henderson now, I might never mention her.

Miss Valentine did not seem impressed by the reference to this aggregation of brains. She stared impressively at her manager.

"Mr. Foster has a great play up his sleeve," she said.

For the first time since our introduction, Holbrook let his eyes rest on me. Then I was aware of a swift scrutiny that seemed to pierce my innermost consciousness. He nervously shifted his seat, showing by his manner that I had assumed an importance in his estimation. By the clairvoyance that only married people can understand, I knew that Alice and I were thinking the same thought: he had taken us for Miss Valentine's society-friends!

Miss Valentine clasped her hands and leaned forward toward me in the attitude that she had assumed several times the night before during the play. I recalled that I had seen her photographed in it. "Have you been working on the scenario?" Before I could reply, the actress went on: "Have you written it out *really*? Perhaps you've brought it?"

"I've brought it," said Alice, with an ease that, at the moment, seemed to me one of the most remarkable feats in the world. For some ridiculous reason I felt as if I were about to drop out of my chair, and I was reminded of the times when, before callers, my mother used to discuss my appearance and the peculiarities that made me different from any child that ever lived.

Our Best Society

"Oh, read it. Read it aloud." Miss Valentine urged. "If you only knew how I love Francesca, and how I long to *be* her."

I felt an inner elation too great to allow me to be shocked by the solecism. I observed, however, that Holbrook was rapidly losing interest and growing resentful. He was assigning me to a place among the playwriting bores who besieged him at his office with impossible plays and he was plainly disgusted at being trapped in this way. I suspected, too, that Miss Valentine was enjoying his discomfiture. His face had lost its radiance and had become blank; he actually looked older and plainer.

Alice passed me the manuscript. When I had finished reading the outline of the first act, Miss Valentine rose, gave the pillow on her chair several vigorous punches, and said: "Why, that's very interesting. It's very interesting."

The tone, more than the words, indicated such surprise that I wondered why in the world the girl had asked me to read. What had she expected? I made a mental note that, if I were not so busy, I should have a right to be indignant. However, I went on more animatedly, keeping an eye on Holbrook, who was enveloping me in that fearfully piercing gaze. I saw that he felt determined not to like my scenario if he could possibly help it and that it was to be a battle between us. So, though I apparently focussed my attention on the manuscript, I was really focussing my will on him. When I had finished, he sat unmoved, and I could not decide whether I had lost or won.

We Meet Miss Valentine's Manager 123

Lily Valentine, however, broke out into enthusiasm. "The last act!" she exclaimed. "They all fall down in the last act. But you've kept it up. How in the world did you do it? How clever you must be!" She almost hurled herself on Holbrook's chair. "Wake up, you foolish man! Now is n't that the best scenario you've heard for years?"

To my great relief, Holbrook allowed his blankness to be momentarily dispersed by his former radiance. "It's a very pretty scenario," he said, in a neutral tone, and he eyed me as bank-cashiers eye strangers who present checks.

"Ever written any plays before?" he asked, his manner making it plain that he had ceased to meet me on a social basis and had got down to business, where no advantage could be expected.

When I had shaken my head, Miss Valentine burst out: "But he has a genius for play-writing. If he did n't he never could have held it up like that in the last act. Oh, I was afraid you were going to let it drop," she said, with horror in her tone.

Instantly I perceived that if I did not then and there speak of Letty Henderson I could never look Alice in the face again. A clammy perspiration seemed to break out all over me. I was afraid that I might not be able to force myself to speak. Then I said, with surprise at the fulness of my voice:

"I don't deserve credit for that."

Miss Valentine waved her hand toward Alice. "Oh, it's Mrs. Foster!" she exclaimed.

"It's Miss Henderson," I said, and, somewhat astonished, I found that it was easy to speak now.

"I wrote another third act and Mrs. Foster did n't like it. I can see now that it was very weak. When I read the scenario of the act to Miss Henderson this afternoon she gave it just the twist it needed."

"Well, is n't she a dear!" said Lily Valentine.

"It's something to recognise good ideas when you hear them," said Holbrook, and I experienced a sudden change of feeling toward him. "It's about as valuable as being able to think them up yourself."

These last words gave me a sensation that was just a little painful. They made me recognise that I was entering a world where, without shame, ideas were borrowed and even stolen. In my own business of novel-writing, we tried so desperately to be original!

"It's wonderful, the way Walter Hart picks up ideas," said Miss Valentine. "Everything under the sun suggests them to him. Often when I've been walking along the street with him, or working on the stage at rehearsal, something will be said or done, and *Whoop!* Walter says, 'I can use that!' And he never thinks of writing the ideas down. They just pop into his head, and they stay there till they're ready to pop out."

Lily Valentine rose from her seat and darted toward the door. "It won't take me two minutes to change my gown and—*Bing!* I'll be ready to go out with you. Meanwhile,"—she extended her arms in theatrical benediction—"Author and Manager, confer! And oh, Mrs. Foster, you don't want to stay here with these men, do you? Come up with me."

"Of course!" Alice said, laughing, and away they went, leaving both Holbrook and me mighty uncom-

We Meet Miss Valentine's Manager 125

fortable at being confronted with each other. The situation prompted Holbrook to defend himself by offering me a cigar. "Miss Valentine won't mind," he said carelessly.

Now, I like to smoke a fragrant, mild cigar; but that cigar, as I at once perceived, was a terror. It was long and black and twisted, altogether villainous-looking. I knew it would make me feel miserable; but I had a silly feeling that if I did refuse it, I should in some way lose my grip on Holbrook.

I took it with what I intended to be an indifferent air and I fiercely bit off the end. If Holbrook had intended to rebuke me, he could not have resorted to more effective means than he employed. With the deliberateness of a great actor, he rose from his seat, approached a small table where a silver tray stood, drew from his trousers pocket a silver-mounted pen-knife, and, with the tip of one of the blades, he delicately beheaded his cigar over the tray. Meanwhile, I was holding my cigar in my mouth, getting a foretaste of the ordeal to come. I had a sickly remembrance of those pleasant mild Havanas that I had smoked at the Van Zandts'.

Holbrook cast a glance around the room and, not discovering matches, he drew a silver match-box from his silk-waistcoat, and passed me a light, letting his fingers lightly touch mine. Every move he made had the ease of perfect confidence. Never had I been so impressed by an exhibition of the successful man of the world, and never had I felt more envious and resentful. Walter Hart's manner had depressed me without exciting envy; but, while resenting Hol-

brook's manner, I felt a hopeless ambition to be exactly like him.

When we had re-adjusted ourselves in our chairs, settling into the comfortable attitude that men take when they are smoking, Holbrook said: "How long have you been writing plays?"

I had just taken a deep inhalation, and received the first assault. A moment before, I reflected, I had felt so well.

"I've never written one," I replied, and from sheer awkwardness I had to take another long puff. I would not allow myself to take the short nervous puffs of the amateur smoker, anxious to get the cigar out of his mouth before it bit him.

"Well, there's a lot of money in play-writing," Holbrook remarked, throwing back his head, his eyes, face, and his whole body expressing seraphic peace, deepening in proportion to the strength of the tobacco.

"Yes, if you hit it off!" I said, with a wretched pretence of humour. I could see my image in the long gilt-framed mirror on the opposite wall, and I kept a sharp watch on my complexion.

"Oh, of course." In his voice there was a hint of impatience with my truism.

Then a long silence followed, in which I watched a curtain of smoke form between us.

"I'm pretty worried about this piece of ours," Holbrook went on, and, to my alarm, I noticed that his voice seemed a few feet farther away than it had been before. "Of course, I didn't want to let *her* know," he explained, with a nod, designed to indicate the actress upstairs.

We Meet Miss Valentine's Manager 127

I could not think of anything to say, and after a few moments, it occurred to me that my silence was rather impressive. At any rate, it gave me a few moments in which to recuperate. I looked forward with dread to the moment when I should have to tackle that cigar again. Suppose, I thought, I should rise and quietly place the cigar on the table. That might be taken by Holbrook as an indication of disapproval and might give me a distinct advantage, even though it would undoubtedly incur his secret resentment; but I felt as if I could no more cross the room at that moment than I could walk along the ceiling. I was indissolubly attached to the chair, my inclination being to sink deeper and deeper within its embrace.

"If this thing does n't go, we've got to have something for Lily," said Holbrook, with determination, and I raised my arm mechanically and placed that infernal tobacco between my lips again. I realised that I was in a very delicate position; I naturally could not criticise Walter Hart's play, and I must not show too great an eagerness to secure a commission from Holbrook.

"I don't know just what Hart's doing now; but I think he could make a mighty fine play out of that scenario of yours."

At the sound of these words, my heart gurgled. These are the only words that describe the sensation. For protection, I kept the cigar in my mouth, but I did not puff on it.

"You two fellows might get together and see if you can't write a play in collaboration. Would you be willing to do that?"

"Oh, yes," I replied, and then I called myself a fool and a coward, and various other uncomplimentary epithets. I wondered if Holbrook had cleverly planned his suggestion with regard to Hart's using my scenario in preparation for the idea that we collaborate, or if he had merely made a chance shot. In either case, I should have a sorry report to make to Alice. The consciousness of my stupidity caused me to take several fierce puffs of that cigar. My nerves began to vibrate, like the wires of a piano out of tune; a fine perspiration broke out on my forehead. Again I looked into the mirror, and, either from the effect of the afternoon light, modified by the shades of the window, or from my nervousness, or both, I saw that my face had turned to a shade of pale green.

With each puff the strength of that cigar had gone on increasing and I had reached the point where only one-half was left, a remnant of intense vitality. I resolved not to force my lips to touch the thing again, and I looked vaguely about for a receptacle into which I could toss it without being observed. But Holbrook would not take his eyes off me. I felt myself sinking into a sickly lethargy, from which it seemed I should never recover; my arms had doubled their natural weight and my legs ached.

"I don't know how he'd be to work with," Holbrook said at last. I had begun vaguely to wonder if he would ever speak again, and I noted with surprise that he still appeared to be perfectly at ease. "He's written a couple of plays with Jimmy Burnham. Oh, they were adaptations!" he added, shrugging his shoulders. "Jimmy is a great French and German

We Meet Miss Valentine's Manager 129

sharp, and he 's always chasing after foreign plays to be fixed up for this country." The manager smiled knowingly. "Most of 'em have to be washed a good bit before we can do anything with 'em." He stroked his close-shaven chin with one hand. "I don't believe Hart would care especially about collaborating. Still you might try."

At that moment I was not in the mood to contemplate anything that cost an effort. I had reached the plane in my consciousness characterised by extreme ugliness. The hatred that I felt for Holbrook for having given me that cigar annihilated all other feelings. I was no longer afraid of him; I had no further ambition to impress him. I merely felt miserable, and I resentfully wondered what I should do when Alice and Lily Valentine came down and I should have to rise from my chair. At that instant they both appeared. Holbrook leaped from his seat, and I made a feeble pretence of rising, by resting both hands on the sides of the chair and leaning forward.

"Mrs. Foster and I have a fine idea!" Lily Valentine exclaimed. In her tight-fitting black suit, she looked slimmer and more delicate than I had ever seen her. I wondered how so frail a girl could endure the strain of acting night after night for a whole season.

"What 's that?" Holbrook asked, his face beaming again. One might have imagined that the girl had made a brilliant sally.

"We think that Walter Hart and Mr. Foster ought to collaborate!"

Holbrook became convulsed with laughter. That 's

exactly what I proposed a minute ago!" he cried, in a loud voice.

"Oh!" said Miss Valentine in a tone suggesting that the idea had lost its novelty and, in some remote way, conveying a rebuke. Holbrook immediately drooped.

"I don't feel by any means certain that he 'll do it," the actress went on. "Still you might ask him, Mr. Manager."

"Well, I guess I 'll leave that to you!" Holbrook exclaimed, recovering his good-humour.

I rose heavily and, as we started to leave the room, I rested my hand lightly on Alice's arm. "What 's the matter?" she whispered.

"Are you going to walk?" Holbrook asked, and we were all bunched together so that I had no chance to allay Alice's anxiety.

"Yes. Why not, on this lovely afternoon?" said the actress.

"I have a cab out here with room for two in it. You and Mrs. Foster might take it, and Foster and I will walk."

"We don't want your old cab," the actress impatiently replied. "We 'll meet you over at Walter's."

"Oh, but I 'm not going," Holbrook said, with a display of his fine white teeth. "Wallie has seen enough of me for the past few days. I 've got to have a heart-to-heart talk with him to-morrow and I 'll give him a little time to get ready for it."

"I suppose that means cutting and more rehearsing?" Miss Valentine lamented. "Well, good-bye," she added, with a sudden assumption of haughtiness,

We Meet Miss Valentine's Manager 131

and, as Holbrook pulled back the door of the cab, we walked unceremoniously away. It seemed to me a curious situation; but just then I felt too wretched to trust my judgment; I should have to let Alice interpret it to me later. I was content to walk on heavily. I knew then how our elephantine domestic must feel as she ploughed her way through life.

"Is n't he a very enterprising person?" said Miss Valentine, addressing me, as we turned into Fifth Avenue, and I was struck by the oddity of the remark. "Oh, he's desperately clever," Miss Valentine went on, with an air of aloofness that indicated a lack of interest. Then she added, as if definitely dismissing the manager from the conversation: "I do hope we sha'n't find poor Walter sick in bed. I really could n't tell how he felt from what he said over the telephone. I believe he'd act or make jokes on his death-bed." She surveyed the crowded avenue, taking a deep inhalation of the cold autumn air, which I was inwardly blessing for its restorative qualities. It was not nearly so hard to walk straight now as I had feared it would be. By keeping my lips slightly parted and by breathing quickly, I seemed to cleanse my whole system. Alice, I knew, was covertly watching me and I suspected that she had divined the cause of the trouble.

"Ah, New York, New York! How I love it!" Lily Valentine rhapsodised. "People who can live here all the time have no idea how they are blessed. Every one of them ought to be obliged to spend a few months of the year, as we actor-people do, on the road. Then they'd be properly grateful."

If I had felt well enough, I should have argued that New Yorkers appreciated their city altogether too much; they were as provincial as any people in the world. Lily Valentine had unwittingly touched on one of my favourite topics; but I was hoarding rather than expending my energy, and I let the remark pass.

“Ugh! the thought of going out on the road makes me sick!” the actress went on. We had fallen in with the procession, and all along the line it was plain that our companion was recognised. She held her head high and swung forward, looking very tall and angular, and either unaware of the people who tried to bow to her or deliberately ignoring them. I noted her demeanour as an amusing exhibition of the effect of public success on extreme youth. How delightful it must be, I thought, to be so important and so young at the same time!

“Still it must be a comfort to have so much variety in your life,” I heard Alice say, as some pushing young men, in order to get a good look at the actress, walked between us.

“Variety!” Lily Valentine repeated, and I hurried to catch up, fearing to lose any of her talk. “When you have nothing but variety, it becomes as terrible as monotony. And, after all, we don’t have variety, really. The small towns we visit are about all alike, and, from the front, the audiences look exactly the same. The only point of any importance to us is whether there’s a good hotel in the town. But New York!” The actress sighed rapturously and gazed across the street at St. Patrick’s Cathedral: the wide open doors gave a distant view of the gleaming altar,

We Meet Miss Valentine's Manager 133

making a contrast to all the worldliness about us that appealed to my literary sense. "Every brick in the streets I love! Some day, when I get old and played out as an actress, I'm going to hire a room over a shop on Broadway near Thirty-fourth Street, and I'm going to spend all my time hanging out of the window."

Before we reached Walter Hart's house, I felt very much better, almost equal, in fact, to sustaining a call on the great dramatist. Miss Valentine turned at the tall iron gate with the low steps leading to the entrance. The house was so different from the long stretch of hideousness on each side of the street that I had often observed it with curiosity.

As we stood in the little porch, the actress whispered, apparently fearing that Hart would hear her: "This house is Walter all over! Such a place you've never seen in your life. Even out here you see how fantastic and pretty it is. No one in New York but Walter Hart would think of having the house built back like this, and making this attractive approach. And did you notice what a nice effect he has made with common, ordinary brick, and how he has varied the old-fashioned rigidity of the colonial architecture, by those little figures he has had built into the wall? He planned it all himself and, instead of going to Europe one summer, as he always does, he stayed at home to watch the architect and workmen. That poor architect! Walter must have driven him crazy. When the architect would say, 'Oh, such a thing is impossible, Mr. Hart!' Walter would put his hands in his pockets and rise up and down on his toes and

say, 'Well, go ahead and do it.' He gives beautiful impersonations of that architect."

Miss Valentine might have gone on indefinitely with these revelations if, at that moment, the butler had not opened the door and admitted us. We entered an extraordinary room: literally a marble hall, with a fountain in the centre, from which a gentle stream of water flowed, descending upon a mass of large, bright-coloured flowers that kept merrily bobbing. From the back ran a flight of broad marble-steps, at the head of which, as soon as the door closed behind us, a strange figure appeared, dressed all in flowered silk, loose, light-grey, bloomer-like trousers, and a long, flowing reddish-brown coat.

Instantly I was reminded of a Chinese mandarin.

"Oh, is that you, Lily? I'm delighted to see you. And you've brought that haughty young man."

Hart had come forward noiselessly, as if his feet were clad in sandals, and he gave Alice a smile of welcome.

"I'm not supposed to be seeing any one to-day," he explained. "But I'm delighted that you're here just the same."

Then I suspected that he had been listening over the stairs.

CHAPTER IX

WALTER HART ENTERTAINS US

AS Hart offered a limp hand to each of us, the smooth-faced servant looked on with a suspicious respectfulness. He was fat and uncouth, and he wore an old black suit and an ancient collar that seemed oddly out of place in all that magnificence. Beneath his servile mask, I divined an amused interest in the daily spectacle that Walter Hart's life created for him.

"George will take your hat," said Hart, with a lackadaisical glance from me to the servant, and he led the way up the winding marble stairs. In the upper hall an armoured figure confronted us, its polished surface reflecting the electric light that shone from the ceiling. The sides of the hall were hung with tapestry, and an enormous Persian rug nearly covered the hardwood floor. To the right extended the dining-room; the walls and the hangings, of a deep red, with the mahogany table and sideboard gleaming with glass and silver, made an effect of almost oppressive luxury. The drawing-room, that ran to the left, was long and narrow, after the conventional New York type, but with the rigidity of its lines broken by the arrangement of the Empire furniture.

As we entered, Hart turned on the electric light in

a dozen bulbs, including those in the two green-shaded lamps on the long table in the middle of the room. The brilliancy thrown on the white-satin wall-paper with a faint, invisible design traced on its surface, made my eyes blink.

"Oh, Wallie!" exclaimed Lily Valentine. "I get enough of the footlights at the theatre."

"If I had known you were coming I would have provided a calcium," he said, dancing back into the hall. With a twist of his finger he turned off all the light except that in the lamps.

"That 's better," said the actress, sinking into one of the chairs and letting her eyes roam over the crowded table, covered with books and magazines and ash-trays, and with photographs of actors and actresses, all of them boldly autographed with expressions of esteem. "You are so spectacular, Wallie. Now, if you would only allow your visitors to be gradually overwhelmed with all this grandeur, and made perfectly miserable with envy, instead of trying to hit them right between the eyes!" She rested both hands on the carved arms of the chair and breathed ecstatically. "Wallie gets awfully cross if people don't faint away the first time they come into his new home."

"Don't call it a *home*, Lily!" the dramatist petulantly exclaimed. "It sounds like an orphan asylum." He walked toward the grate, where the remains of a coke-fire emitted an occasional spark. "If you want to be refined, call it an abode," he went on, seizing an andiron. As he fiercely poked at the fire, his loose Oriental garments betrayed what his conventional

black clothes of the night before had mercifully hidden: success was developing embonpoint. "Oh, what a nuisance that is!" he said, throwing back the andiron on the rack with a loud clatter. "I cannot make George keep that fire going. He will simply drive me distracted." Then he ran out into the hall and called, over the stairs, "George! George!"

Alice and I watched him with intense curiosity. Lily Valentine looked mildly amused. It was plain that she knew what was about to happen.

From below the staircase I saw the smooth face arise, wearing an expression of benignant wonder.

"Well, now, I think it's a shame that you people can't keep this fire going! You are all so lazy that I don't know what to do. Here you've had nothing to do since luncheon, except to attend the door and look after that fire. But you can't even do that right. Have you ever seen me idle?" Hart's eyes flashed indignantly. "Of course, you have n't. I'm busy every minute of the time." Here he swept back into the room, his silk trousers sagging around his ankles. "Just look at that hod, will you?" he said, lowering his voice, and pointing to a piece of shining brass that I knew was making Alice sick with admiration. "Not a piece of coal in it!"

The servant who had meekly followed Hart into the room drew down the corners of his mouth, took up the hod, and said in a low voice: "I'll bring some, sir." Then, as he turned, I perceived a light in his eye that betrayed many things besides his relation to Erin.

Walter Hart watched him till he had disappeared.

"Well, as Maggie Cline says," he exclaimed, throwing up both hands, "God knows I have troubles of my own?"

"Even when you have to make them up yourself," Lily Valentine cheerfully assented. "Now," she resumed, folding her hands in her lap, "don't you think we 'd better talk about some real troubles?"

"That means you and the play you forced me to write for you. Now, I told you they 'd roast it. If you 've come to ask me to tinker it for you, I simply won't do it."

"I 'm so glad," Miss Valentine murmured, sweetly.

"Well, that throws an entirely different light on the matter. What are you glad about?"

"We sha'n't have to have another rehearsal now. So I can play around in the country all day to-morrow."

"For heaven's sake, go ahead and play! That 'll do you more good than all the rehearsals in Christendom—unless—" Walter Hart's face assumed a look of alarm—"unless it 's with the *charming* people."

From the smile with which Miss Valentine received this remark he saw that his fears were confirmed. "I 've a good mind to insist on a rehearsal, just to keep you from acting all day long—for nothing." He sank back in his seat, spreading out the skirts of his coat. "Of course, all the things they said against your performance are true; I 've said them to you myself a thousand times. But *me*—they have n't any idea what I 'm driving at, the critics here in New York. Now, over in Philadelphia they appreciate me. There 's a man on one of the papers there,—he comes over to every one of my first-nights,—and he

says in his column this morning that my last act reminded him of George Eliot."

Miss Valentine swayed to one side, pretending to faint. "Is that the mood you're in to-day?" she gasped. Then she sat up and appealed to Alice and me. "This is his Shakespearian mood. It first came on when he found that he'd written more plays than Shakespeare. And so young, too!" She turned on Hart the most languishing of her glances. "I wonder if rude and unappreciative actresses ever guyed Shakespeare," she flippantly added.

"No, Shakespeare was spared that indignity," Hart promptly retorted. "They knew better than to allow women to appear on the stage in those days. That's why they had boys instead, because they knew how the vanity and the silliness of the women would interfere with the dramatists."

"Oh, for shame!" Lily Valentine chided, and the flush that suffused her cheek betrayed that she was really embarrassed.

"Well, it's a fact!" Walter Hart exclaimed, warming up to his subject. "All that an actress cares about nowadays is a sympathetic part, instead of taking what's offered her by the dramatist and being very humble and grateful about it, too. That's why I have to write so much rot. If Shakespeare had been writing for women, do you suppose he'd ever have dared to introduce a Lady Macbeth or The Queen in *Hamlet*? Never! Now don't you agree with me?" Hart insisted, with his eyes on Alice.

"No, I don't think I do!" Alice replied, with an emphasis that I noted with surprise.

"Walter, stop posing!" said Miss Valentine. "He does n't really mean a word of what he says. He's just trying to see if he can scare us into agreeing with him. Why," she went on scornfully, "Shakespeare's women are perfectly beautiful, nearly every one of them. You can see that he does n't *hate* them as you do some of your women. Hamlet's mother he did n't like as much as the others, perhaps because he was afraid of widows, and he didn't believe in second marriages. And as for Lady Macbeth, I'd rather play her any day than one of your feline creatures, Walter."

At this turn I felt a little alarmed; but Hart saved the talk from danger by laughing aloud: "You'd be lovely as Lady Macbeth, Lily—in one of the music halls."

The servant, who had been fussing with the fire under the dramatist's eye, started to leave the room; but Hart called to him.

"I suppose I've got to feed you people. Bring the tea things, George. How about you, Mr. Foster? Scotch?"

"Mind you bring the right glasses," said Hart as the servant left the room. "Ah, those happy, happy days," he mused, "when I was struggling and living in a hall-bedroom just big enough to hold a bed, and a desk, and a lovely gas-stove. Whenever I began to suffocate from the stove I'd turn off the gas and I'd hold my head out of the window till I revived. By that time I'd be nearly frozen to death and I'd have to turn the gas on full force again. There was something fascinating about that life, passing from

one form of extermination to another, and writing a little between times. After this house, how small that bedroom would seem!"

"Hardly big enough, I suppose, to hold your head," Miss Valentine absently remarked.

Hart turned to me with warning in his eyes. "See what you 'll have to go through when you become a dramatist! Don't you think you 'd better stick to book-writing?"

"Oh, Wallie," said Miss Valentine, with deep impressiveness, "he 's got the most wonderful play up his sleeve, and you 've got to write it with him."

Hart literally threw up his hands. "Collaboration? Now, Lily, I 'm disappointed in you. Honestly I am. Why does n't he write his own play?"

"Because he 's different from you. He 's modest."

"Well, I made up my mind a year ago that I 'd never collaborate again if I—well, if I had to give up writing and go on the stage myself, and I can't think of any fate worse than that. If the piece fails, then your collaborator goes around explaining that you were responsible and the only good things in it were his, anyway. If it 's a success, his friends let it be quietly known that he really did all the work. No, I 'm getting to be too old a bird to be caught like that again. I 've got a reputation at last and I 'm going to work it for all I 'm worth. I have so many orders on hand that I honestly don't know where to begin. Ten thousand dollars in advance, and all the royalties and all the glory for little me! You ought to know that, Lily. Besides," he cried out, as if a light had

suddenly broken on him, "what do you want a new play for?"

Here Miss Valentine's face grew scarlet. "Well, your play can't last forever, Walter."

"It ought to be good for two seasons, *anyway*."

"After all those roasts this morning?" Miss Valentine asked, growing bolder.

"Bah! What do they amount to? I've got out of the reach of the New York papers by this time. They can't hurt me."

The servant came in with a tray covered with elaborate silver tea-things and with tall glasses.

"You pour the tea, Mrs. Foster, won't you, please?" said Hart, graciously, and Alice changed her seat. I felt somewhat relieved. We might now have some hope of getting into the game. Thus far, Alice and I had been woefully out of it.

To me Hart passed the heavy decanter containing the Scotch. "What a lovely glass!" said Alice, and I poured myself a stiff drink.

"Yes, that is rather nice, I think," Hart carelessly remarked. "I picked it up in Venice a couple of years ago. What a time I had getting it home! I suppose your play is from the story we talked about last night, is n't it?" he suddenly asked, holding up his glass toward me and adding, "*Prosit*." "Well, you've got a play there, all right, only not for this little girl. She'd kill it."

"Oh, you *monster*!" Lily Valentine cried in a high voice. "It's the kind of part I've been longing for."

"Just as soon as I get time to breathe," Walter

Hart resumed, ignoring the actress, "I intend to call all the American dramatists together—there must be at least five of us now—and organise a club for the restraint of 'stars.' Every member shall bind himself to a solemn pledge that he will not allow any 'star,' male or female, to play a part unless the club agrees, by a majority vote, that the 'star' is really able to play it. We really must do something to protect ourselves."

"I shall insist that the club be called 'The Hack-Dramatists' Union,'" said Lily Valentine.

"One of the chief purposes of the Society," Hart went on loftily, "will be the encouragement of marriage among bad actors. For example: there are many actors and actresses that ought to leave the stage for the stage's good, you know. These actresses are in nearly all instances delightful ladies. We will introduce them to millionaires with a view to matrimony. Whenever a match is arranged the happy actress will sign a paper and place it in the Society's archives, promising never to act again. Marriages on similar conditions the Society will undertake to arrange between *matinée* idols, every one of whom is a bad actor, and *matinée* girls. I personally know dozens of *matinée* girls able to support actor-husbands for the rest of their lives."

"The idea is perfectly fascinating!" cried Lily Valentine, determined not to be put down. "But how about those actor-people who would never think of marrying out of the profession?"

"I've thought of them, too. At first they bothered me. But now I see that they are the most easily

disposed of. In fact, they will enable us to kill two birds with one stone, as it were. My plan is this: to establish a fund to which the playgoing public will be glad to subscribe generously, providing doweries for bad actresses who marry bad actors. Both contracting parties will agree, of course, to leave the stage forever. And,—wait a minute! I know what you are going to say,—their children will, naturally, be stagestruck from birth, and they will be bad actors too. To keep them off the stage we will provide them with pensions. Furthermore, to protect the theatre against them, we will make the managers promise not to employ them. After a time we could work up a superstition against them.”

Miss Valentine shook her head despairingly. “It’s a beautiful idea! But you never could keep them out that way, though all of us real artists would do our best to coöperate with you. They’d take your money, and then they’d go on again under assumed names. You’d find long strings of automobiles waiting for millionaires’ wives at the stage door of every theatre in the land. No, you’ll have to think of an arrangement—more expedient and less farcical, Walter,” Miss Valentine declared, and she drew out a little jewelled watch. “Heavens! It’s nearly six o’clock! Why do you talk so much?”

“Merely to keep you quiet for a few minutes and give you a rest.” Lily Valentine rose from her seat. “What’s on to-night?”

“A dinner at Sherry’s—the usual thing,” the actress replied.

“Oh, you’ll be a wreck before the season’s half

over," Hart lamented, "and you'll have to close up. You're taking the bread out of my mouth."

"Well, my dear, that might reduce your weight "

Alice and I had followed Miss Valentine's example, and Hart rose and faced us. "To think that I discovered her, and made her and wrote a play for her! And this is the way she treats me."

Miss Valentine walked across the room and I thought she was going to kiss him. "And when I ask him to do one little thing for me!" she exclaimed, holding her chin coquettishly in the air.

"Now stop worrying, my child, and the piece will be all right. Besides, I could n't collaborate even if I would," Hart remarked, sententiously, taking us all in with his bright, ferret-like eyes. "But you go ahead and write your play," he went on, addressing me, "and when my piece wears itself out so far as Lily's concerned, let her put yours on. After you get it done, come up and we'll go over it together."

I murmured, "Thank you," and I felt snubbed, though I perceived that Hart meant to be generous.

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Shakespeare-Bacon," said Miss Valentine, holding her jewelled fingers in the air. They were exquisitely manicured and, at the tips, they were as pink as a baby's. I did not blame Walter Hart for reverently pressing his lips against them.

"I'll have to take a cab and jump into a dinner-gown," said the actress. "I'll be late, anyway; but I can't help that. We'll pick up a cab as we go along."

Hart bade us good-bye with an air of *camaraderie*, plainly intended to make me feel more comfortable. When we reached the street Miss Valentine exclaimed:

"Well, I suppose you want to kill me!"

"For what?" I asked, innocently.

"For putting you through all that."

"It was very pleasant to see the *house*," Alice remarked, and Lily Valentine laughed aloud.

"You'll simply have to do the play yourself," she declared. "Oh, here's a cab. Stop it before it gets by. Now you'll both get in, won't you, and then you can go on from my house? I wish I could take you home myself."

"We want to walk," Alice quickly interposed.

"Well, I'll see you to-morrow anyway." Miss Valentine leaped into the cab, and then she turned to give her address to the driver. "Good-bye," she called out, and away she went.

Before I had a chance to give vent to my feelings, Alice burst out: "It was providential, Ned. We found him in just the right mood. Now you can do the play by yourself. That will be much better. If you did it with him he'd get all the credit, and you'd probably have an awful time with him anyway. It's splendid, splendid! Isn't she perfectly infatuated with him?"

"What!" I gasped.

"Could n't you see it?" Alice asked, pityingly.

"She guyed him all the time. And he guyed her. They're always guying each other. I suppose you think he's in love with her."

"Oh, Ned! There you are again, attributing silly

opinions to me. Of course he is n't in love with her —yet."

"But you think he will be."

"That depends."

"On what?"

"On the way she manages him."

I had a sudden attack of rage that seemed to come from my innermost being. I always feel enraged when I hear of a woman *managing* a man. This time I controlled myself for the purpose of getting at what was in Alice's mind.

"What do you mean by managing him?" I said, trying not let my tone seem bitter. "How can *she* manage *him*?"

"Well, of course, you can see that he's awfully fond of her."

"He looks upon her as a mere child."

"Exactly. And what an advantage that gives her! You see, dear, he is plainly used to being flattered and petted by the actresses and the other women he meets, and he's suspicious of them. But Miss Valentine he regards as a child, and he's proud of having 'made' her, as he says. If he knew what a dangerous position he's in, he'd be scared to death. I think she's taken a step forward this afternoon."

"How?" I asked, in an awed whisper. All this underground observation had a painful fascination for me. It suggested reams of "copy" destined to remain under my eye unseen, lost. I felt the despairing pangs of conscious incompetence.

"He was awfully piqued by her suggesting that he collaborate with you on the play, with any one, in

fact," Alice hastily added. "And, of course, the mere implication that his own piece might not be a success jarred him."

"Yes, I saw that!" I exclaimed, glad of a chance to exploit my own insight. I added satirically: "Then you've decided to get them married."

We had turned into Fifth Avenue again, and Alice walked on for several moments without replying. Somehow, in the dark, the crowd had lost its impressiveness; besides, it had considerably diminished. The extravagantly dressed women drove past less frequently in the cabs, and only an occasional frock-coat ornamented the sidewalk.

"It does n't at all follow that they will marry," said Alice. "By the time he falls in love with her she may not care so much for him. In fact, his falling in love with her may destroy her interest in him altogether—her romantic interest, I mean. She's probably so spoiled, too, by having men fall in love with her that his indifference piques her. At any rate," she concluded, following a line of thought that my mind had been anxiously pursuing, "it is n't at all likely to interfere with our scheme."

"I wish I felt sure of that," I said.

"But is n't it absurd," she resumed, with indignation in her tone, "that he should live in that house all alone? It's positively selfish. A man with a house like that ought to be married."

As we were in a public thoroughfare, I refrained from starting a discussion that could not be properly concluded within several exciting hours. I will say right here, though, that if there is anything that

makes me mad it is the belief prevalent among the members of a certain sex that because a man is rich it's a disgrace for him to be a bachelor.

"I suppose that Mary is out," I said, to change the subject.

"So we need n't go home. We might go to a restaurant."

"Very well," I agreed, with a profound sigh.

"There's not much in the ice-chest."

"To be honest, dear, I'm all tired out from the agitation of our life this day. But if you insist on going to a restaurant——"

"I don't insist," Alice said with an indifference which assured me that she was ready to be noble if I wished to exact the sacrifice.

"Do you know, Alice," I said, "I never love home so much as when Mary is absent? It is n't quite the same to me when she's there."

"It would be very different to me, too, if she were to disappear altogether. Of course, I know there have been literary men's wives who have done all their household work, and very little credit they get in their husbands' biographies. And as for their husbands' *auto*-biographies, I don't believe that a word in their praise has ever been written. You'd think from the way the autobiographies sailed along that authors never ate, or had their clothes done up for the wash, or complained about the household expenses. And such appetites as some of them must have had! I've always believed that Carlyle got his dyspepsia from overeating. But the way authors rise above the mention, and even the memory, of

such details! It's so grand that I often feel like bursting into tears."

"We will go to a restaurant," I replied, in a calm, even tone. Then I loudly exclaimed: "We will go to Sherry's if you like."

"No, Ned," said Alice, clutching at my arm. "I'm not well enough dressed, and besides, Lily Valentine might see us."

"What of it if she should?" I petulantly asked. Here again was a consideration utterly foreign to the masculine mind.

"It would look queer." Then, before I had time to probe this statement, Alice went on: "We'll go home and be Darby and Joan again."

When we reached home and assured ourselves that Mary was not there, we changed our raiment for some of our oldest clothes, and we prowled about in the kitchen, and, putting our heads together over the ice-chest, we gathered some chicken and fried bacon and salad and cheese. Then Alice made some coffee. As we ate, instead of sitting together at opposite ends of the table in the dignified propriety that we maintain before Mary, we sat side by side.

While we were at the salad, we both heard a shuffling of feet in the hall, and before we had time to cast at each other a look of alarm, the electric bell gave a long ring.

"One of the *literati*?" Alice asked in a shocked voice. At that moment the most friendly intruder was an enemy.

"No," I hopefully replied, "the *literati* never ring

in that brazen manner. They're too timid and refined. It must be a messenger-boy."

Alice dashed into the kitchen to keep out of sight. "If I have to dress again to-day I shall die!" she exclaimed under her breath.

I opened the door, as people do when they dread invasion, slowly, covertly. At sight of a uniformed messenger-boy, however, I regained my composure, and I threw the door wide open. What a charm a messenger can have. He is even more fascinating than the post-man. They both suggest some unexpected luck that will change the whole aspect of life. Before I had time to read the address, Alice shouted over my shoulder, "It's for me," and she drew it from my hand. When she had torn open the envelope and read the note she said, "M'm!"

"More Society?" I asked.

"It's from Letty Henderson." As Alice walked into the dining-room, I followed and she held up the note so that I might let my eyes run over it.

"MY DEAREST ALICE:

"I forgot to ask you this afternoon if you would n't let me drive down for you to-morrow morning. So I'm going to take for granted that you will. It will be a tight squeeze for three in our little *coupé* but I will make myself as small as possible.

"Mamma was so pleased when I told her about my luncheon to-day that she wants very much to meet you and Mr. Foster. She says she hopes you will both come back here with me in the afternoon and eat a simple dinner. Affectionately yours,

"LETTY."

When I had finished reading, I remarked: "Well, you've made a hit with her all right. But how about that dinner?"

"Oh, it will be a simple dinner," Alice replied, in a tone that suggested her thoughts were on other things.

"Yes, that fact has already been mentioned. And of course, it makes the prospect all the more alluring, though in the matter of simplicity we can give the Hendersons cards and spades."

"We sha'n't even have to dress, and we can leave by half-past eight."

"A day gone out of my life," I tragically lamented. "Still," I went on, determined to be philosophical, "after Ardsley I shall be a wreck anyway."

"Now," said Alice, in her most lilting manner, "this is really providential. After Mary attends to the wash, she won't have any dinner to get, and she can go to her sister's in Hoboken."

"That, of course, is the strongest argument you have advanced so far. Let us break up our home, let us work any graft, so long as the result is pleasant for Mary."

"Oh, Ned," Alice pleaded, "you've been so good to-day up to this minute." She waited to make sure that the shot had hit a vital part. Then, seeing that she had completely reduced me, she continued, pleasantly: "Of course, it's perfectly plain what Letty Henderson's up to. If we drive to the Holland House with her, she will have the feeling that she can cling to us every minute. That mother of hers is forcing her to go, though I can see the poor girl dreads putting in a whole day with Teddy."

"Oh, what partisans you women are!"

"And then, our going with her like that makes it easy for us to meet her mother in that informal way."

"So you think the old lady does n't really want us?"

"She wants to see what we are like."

"Alice!" I said, impressively.

"What?"

"If men knew the insidious complications of feminine life do you suppose that any man would ever dare to get married?"

Alice superciliously lifted her eyebrows. "And if any woman knew how positively thick the brightest man can be at a critical time, do you suppose she'd ever accept a proposal?"

At ten o'clock we heard Mary stealthily entering the house. On returning from her absence, she invariably enters like a thief in the night. Alice always refuses to investigate. The consciousness of Mary's presence roused Alice to prepare feverishly for the next day, and it was past midnight before we turned out the last light.

"Have you thought, my dear," I said, as the clock approached midnight, "how much time we waste over details?"

"Life consists of details," Alice epigrammatically responded.

"But we ought not to be overwhelmed by them."

"Still, there's such a thing as ignoring them altogether, and putting your own burdens on other people."

I saw that at this moment I was no match for Alice. I was sleepy, and she was in the state of

nervous exhilaration that seizes on any pretext for argument. I resolved to be politic, and, leaning back in my chair, with my head resting on my arm, I began to relax into unconsciousness.

"What are *you* going to wear?" said Alice.

I sat up with a start. "What?" I repeated, to gain time.

When I had heard the remark again I tried to rouse myself. "Oh, my blue serge will do."

Alice sniffed. "It needs to be pressed."

"Well, send Mary around the corner to the tailor's with it in the morning."

Alice paid no heed to my remark. "Do you want me to leave a note for Mary?" Alice asked, and observing the bewildered expression in my eyes, she explained: "We'll have to send those clothes to the tailor's by seven o'clock at the latest or we shall keep Letty Henderson and the others waiting. It will be awful if you get into one of your stews as we are about to start."

I bowed my head in meek submission. "'I will in all my best obey you, Madam,'" I said in my finest Shakespearian manner.

"Then write, in a large, round hand, with wide spaces between the words, 'Please take to tailor's right off. Must have them back by eight o'clock.'"

"What's the use of writing?" I asked, and I quickly added: "You'll probably be up at five anyway, and you'll tell Mary about the clothes long before she has time to read the note."

That was a stupid blunder. I can offer no excuse for it. It was merely the usual masculine effort,

doomed to failure, to thwart an elemental feminine impulse. With the air of a deeply wronged woman Alice walked to my desk and I followed. The note to Mary she printed on a piece of copy-paper in a large hand, and, returning to the bedroom, she drew my blue-serge suit from the wardrobe, pinned the paper to the waistcoat, and disappeared with the bundle into the darkness at the back of the house. I listened intently till she returned. There was a curious expression in her eyes, and I waited for her to speak.

"Mary's door was closed," she said. "She usually leaves it open."

I stood motionless.

"She was breathing very heavily."

I nodded. "We've observed her breathing before, dearest. We've often spoken of the power of her breath. In the deep watches of the night it comes to me like a bugle-blast."

"This time it is different," Alice said, significantly. "It is n't merely sound. It's——"

"I've got it!" I exclaimed in a whisper. I have always prided myself on the keenness of my senses. I have often noted the instant when a clock has stopped in a room, and as for——

"What is it?" Alice asked, gazing at my alarmed eyes.

"If I am not mistaken, it is the odour of a very bad brand of Scotch."

Alice convulsively drew her hands together. "And to-morrow—think of leaving her in the house to-morrow! I must n't let her go to Hoboken."

"She 's probably come straight from there. We'll

have to keep her at home. But she'll be sorry in the morning and she'll work all the harder."

When I woke in the morning the sun was shining into my room, and from the sounds in the apartment I knew that life had been stirring there for a long time. I looked at my watch, hanging from my waistcoat at the side of my bed, according to a habit left over from my bachelor-life, and I found that it was nearly half-past eight o'clock. I leaped from the bed and the first thing I noticed was a neat little pile of beautifully pressed clothes lying on a chair. At sight of it I felt one of those impulses of joy and gratitude that to me are one of the greatest blessings of married life. What would life be without Alice! I resolved in future to try to be kind to her in every way, and I grieved at the unfortunate disposition that put me so often in the wrong with her. I proceeded at once to improve my character by getting ready for breakfast as fast as possible. I was adjusting my four-in-hand tie when Alice, in one of her prettiest cloth dresses, with the stamp of the fashionable tailor all over it, entered the room. She smiled at me approvingly and held up her lips to be kissed.

"How's Mary?" I asked.

"A little more respectful and humble than usual. She offered of her own accord to make you some cream-toast."

"Do you think she suspects we've noticed any thing?"

Alice shook her head. "I've planned a day for her that will keep her busy. It seemed a pity to let any of her enthusiasm go to waste."

CHAPTER X

AN OUTING IN THE COUNTRY

AT breakfast Mary avoided my eye. From covert glances, I gathered that she dreaded masculine observation; but if she feared me more than Alice, I reflected, she was making a grave blunder. I knew that I could trust Alice to deal with the problem at its present stage, and I looked forward with some interest to seeing what would happen. Perhaps, too, a lurking feeling that Mary had not rated me very highly influenced my state of mind.

While we were sitting at the table, Letty Henderson arrived, reminding me, in her frail beauty, of a white rose shot with pink. The flower-like suggestion was emphasised by the way she carried her slim and pretty figure: even while she was sitting she swayed lightly. It occurred to me that a rough word would strike her to the ground. There was something appealing about her, something almost pathetic.

When we had entered the carriage, Alice began excitedly to tell Miss Henderson about our experience with Mary, making a long and dramatic story out of it. As I listened, I marvelled at the way women feed their incipient friendship with some of the most intimate and personal details of life, and create intense emotional effects with the rehearsal of trifles.

During the discussion, Miss Henderson swayed like a flower-stalk in a gale.

When we reached the Holland House, we found Teddy Markoe and Monty standing on the sidewalk beside the coach. I noted that Teddy was dressed in what, to my eye, seemed an extraordinary get-up, a long yellow coat, like a cutaway, yellow trousers, tightened at the knees, long yellow boots, and a blue stock around his thick throat. If I had not known who he was I should have taken him for a groom. To be frank, he looked tough. Monty, on the other hand, seemed like a figure out of a Gibson drawing, in a loose-fitting gray suit and with a white stock and grey felt hat. It occurred to me that if Monty were n't so silly he would be a great heart-breaker. When I noted that his shoes were exactly like my own, I felt like shaking hands with him; but I grieved that I had not worn a stock, and I had a beauty at home, too. Still, it was a comfort to think that I had had sense enough to wear a coloured shirt. I could see that, so far as the men were concerned, it was the thing to be as *négligé* as possible; but, of course, making it plain that the effect was a deliberate achievement. Teddy's rig, for example, was a triumph.

"Are we the first?" Miss Henderson asked, and Monty replied:

"Lily Valentine drove down the Avenue pell-mell five minutes ago with her hair all in a tangle. She thought she'd be late, and when she found no one else was here but us two she would n't get out of the cab. Then Mrs. Smith came along and took her into the hotel to fix her up."

"Suppose we go in and find them," said Miss Henderson to Alice.

They started off, leaving me alone with the two boys.

"Great day," said Teddy, absently, seeming to be unaware of the existence of the crowd that had gathered in front of him.

"Yes," I said. "It seems to me that in New York, at this time of year, we have the finest weather in the world."

He plainly did not care for this observation. He stood looking straight ahead. I resolved not to waste any long speeches on him again. In fact, the complete failure of my remark silenced me. To my great relief, Mrs. Van Zandt and Mrs. Eustace rolled up together. Monty rushed forward to open the door of their carriage, and Teddy, still without moving, looked on with mild interest. The two ladies were amazingly flounced and feathered, and, as they extended their white-gloved hands, their eyes shone through their white veils.

At that moment Miss Valentine, in a singularly girlish blue-silk dress, with white spots, and the simplest and prettiest little hat, came out of the hotel, followed by Mrs. Smith, Letty Henderson, and Alice. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Eustace began to shriek at each other and to laugh. From their exchanges I gathered one vital fact, that Cosgrave had said he'd come if he could, and, if he did come, he'd probably be late.

"Well, I object most decidedly to waiting for him! He's a nuisance, that man is!" said Mrs. Smith, emphatically. She, too, was sustaining a good deal of

ornamentation in the way of clothes and millinery, and it made her look curiously old.

The discussion continued for several minutes, with the sublime indifference to the crowd on the part of the participants that I had noticed in Teddy's face. I observed, by the way, that when the talk was at its fiercest, Teddy turned away and caressed the horses.

"Well, we might as well get up," said Mrs. Van Zandt, wearily, "instead of standing here in the street."

Lily Valentine walked back to the steps of the hotel, and Monty followed.

"I will not climb up there till we're ready to start," the actress declared. "I object to being stared at by this mob."

Then Monty made a remark that gave me a strong desire to annihilate him, though I saw that he meant to be humorous. Oh, Humour, what sins have been committed in thy name!

"It's all part of the show, Miss Valentine. It'll be a good advertisement for you."

Miss Valentine turned on him a look that would have paralysed most men. It was the first indication I had ever seen of her capacity for tragedy. Her face grew scarlet and then white around the lips. Monty merely laughed, and began to joke with Letty Henderson, who was keeping near Alice, determined to sit beside her on the coach.

Suddenly it occurred to me that there was no real difference between these women of society and Lily Valentine. At this moment they were displaying

themselves on the public thoroughfare exactly as Lily Valentine exploited herself on the stage. Their apparent unconsciousness of the crowd was like the absorption of the actress in her part—only they were artists, every one of them, including the imperturbable Teddy. They really enjoyed the gaping admiration and envy of these people, and they loved tearing up Fifth Avenue, their finery flying in the air to the tooting of the horn. The same instinct for display moved them as had driven the French nobility on to the horrors of the French Revolution. Now this boy, Teddy, he was enjoying the graft his father had passed on to him through the monopoly of Standard Oil. Mrs. Van Zandt represented millions acquired by another kind of graft, the building of railroads, designed ostensibly to serve the people, but really to put an enormous tax upon them in return for the use of a convenience. Monty was wrapped in the luxury provided by the people's patience with a tariff that so generously contributed to the maintenance of his father's industries.

I had observed Mrs. Van Zandt and Mrs. Smith in excited talk, Mrs. Smith, as usual, laying down the law, and Mrs. Van Zandt, ever apprehensive, casting furtive glances at Mrs. Eustace. Presently Mrs. Smith walked boldly toward Teddy. "I'm going to get up there," she said. "It's ridiculous, our waiting for that man any longer."

Teddy smiled approvingly, and muttered something that made Mrs. Smith laugh aloud. The other ladies climbed after her, Letty Henderson, to my secret amusement, keeping close to Alice. Teddy

helped her with the apparently stolid indifference which marked his attitude toward the rest of the world. I began to feel an admiration for a man who could control himself like that. In fact, I was so impressed that I began to query whether his interest in the girl could be serious, after all.

Mrs. Eustace sat in front of me, spreading out her finery till she occupied room enough for two. Her face was flushed and her eyes glistened; she kept glancing up Fifth Avenue, and then looking us over with the air of being about to say something and not daring to say it.

"Well, are you ready to go?" Teddy cried in a rough voice from the sidewalk.

"All ready!" Mrs. Smith replied, and in her voice I thought I could catch the note of defiance.

Mrs. Eustace's handsome eyes fairly bulged. In a moment, I expected to see them moisten with tears. But, instead, they became luminous. "Oh, here he is now!" she exclaimed, waving her parasol in the air. In the distance, we saw bearing down upon us a hansom-cab with the beautiful Mr. Cosgrave leaning over the low doors. As soon as he reached us, Mrs. Eustace called out severely:

"Oh, you horrid person! We were going without you."

Cosgrave smiled provokingly, turning an impersonal glance on all the ladies. "Why did n't you?" he said, ignoring Mrs. Eustace as an individual and seeming to address us as a body.

"Because we could n't bear to abandon you," replied the amiable Mrs. Van Zandt.

"What was the matter with you, anyway?" Mrs. Eustace insisted. "Have you just got up? I don't believe he's had any breakfast," she added, breathlessly. "We certainly don't intend to wait for you," she threatened.

Cosgrave kept his eyes fixed on Mrs. Van Zandt, as if she had asked the question. "I could n't make up my mind whether to come or to stay at home and work," he said.

"Well, let's go on without him," Mrs. Eustace proposed, and the look in her eyes was painful to see. I wonder why it should always be distressing to observe a woman manœuvring with a man, and why it should be positively odious when the man has the advantage. Is it merely a prejudice, that, like so many other prejudices, men have fostered in order to acquire even more than their natural advantage over women? Or is it a feeling that is inherent in the human race? And yet we expect the woman to be the first to attract—only she must never let us catch her doing it consciously. Whatever explanation may be true, we have certainly done our best to turn women into hypocrites, and then we call hypocrisy one of the worst of their sins.

While the colloquy with Cosgrave was continuing, I could not, to my regret, see Teddy's face. It took no great power of divination, however, to understand the young man's feelings. It would, I confess, have pleased me to see Teddy drive merrily away and leave Cosgrave in that hansom, but, instead, he waited stolidly for the handsome figure to step lightly from the cab, to confer with the cabby, and then, with great

deliberateness, to transfer itself to the place occupied a few minutes before by Mrs. Eustace's draperies. Teddy thereupon cracked his whip, our trumpeter blew a loud blast, and as the idlers gaped we started heavily and then, with a light bound, we bowled along.

All in a rush I felt a fine physical exhilaration. In the first place, it was delightfully novel to sit in that high seat and to move rhythmically through the air up the beautiful canyon of Fifth Avenue. And then—I say it without shame, for I recognise here simply a trait common to our poor human nature, a vulgar trait, it is true, but I repeat that at heart we are all vulgar—there was something entrancing in passing through millionairessdom on the top of that coach surrounded by representatives of so many millions. Best of all, it was fine sport. I envied Teddy, not because he was rich, but because his millions enabled him to be a good sportsman, and because he could drive those horses, and because he could ride to the hounds and have a racing stable, and a yacht, because, in short, being able to do as he pleased, he had sense enough to take at least a part of his pleasures wholesomely.

I think the others must have been affected somewhat as I was, for during the first few minutes they kept silent, enjoying the perfect New York autumn day. I had a feeling that even the horses, now that they had struck their gait, were having a good time, too. The well-dressed and leisurely pedestrians in the Avenue looked at us with pleased faces, as if they approved of us and appreciated the spectacle we were providing for them. The smart-looking children wan-

dering in the sunshine with their nurses crowed with delight.

With a few exceptions the finest houses along the Avenue were closed. The only signs of life they gave came from the lower regions where the caretakers lived. For more than half the year, these palaces stood untenanted. I might have been tempted to philosophise on this waste of wealth if I had not felt too happy to think seriously about anything. I even took an added pleasure in a thought that usually depressed me, of a morning that ought to be devoted to work lost out of my life!

As we skirted the Park, along the huddled magnificence of the dwellings of the newest millionaires, their beauty cramped and degraded by their lack of setting, with the great hotels and apartment houses looming from the west, I had an overpowering sense of the wonder of New York, the Mecca of the conquerors in life, the theatre in which the rich and successful contended for applause. Everything about me seemed to proclaim prosperity and power, and to deny the existence of failure and of poverty and unhappiness. It was inspiring, it was seductive, and if, in my intoxication, I remotely suspected that danger might lie there, too, I found it easy to forget.

By the time we reached the country most of the ladies had adjusted themselves to the coach and had become voluble again. Mrs. Eustace talked almost hysterically, with a great deal of laughter at her own remarks and with a feverish appreciation of Cosgrave's bored commonplaces. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Van Zandt gossiped with intense eagerness, their

comments sounding like quotations from a scandalous society journal. Alice and Letty Henderson were absorbed in each other, though from the bits of their talk that reached me I found nothing of special interest. It was probably such excited enjoyment, if enjoyment it could be called, that made many women so exhausted after the mildest social experiences. How often had I seen Alice come home from an afternoon tea looking and acting as if she had done the work of a day-labourer.

Teddy drove with an air of absorbed determination, the curve of his shoulders suggesting a concentration of force and surliness. Teddy had begun to assume a strong interest for me; I wished that I could know him better.

As we passed through Fordham and up the beautiful thoroughfare running parallel with the Hudson, through Yonkers and Hastings and Tarrytown, the Palisades rising majestically from the opposite shore of the river, the boughs of the trees, with only an occasional leaf clinging to the branches, standing distinct in the clear air, I busied myself with choosing a house for Alice and me, when our ship came in. Those occasional houses desperately clinging to the edge of the Palisades must give a view of the river reaching as far as Grant's Tomb and on fine days stretching out to include the marvellously light and graceful Brooklyn Bridge. I knew we could be very happy in one of those houses. But living there would require a horse, and a run-about for Alice, and a stable and a man. From the pursuit of these considerations I turned resolutely away. There must be more modest

places on this side of the river; but every house that attracted me seemed, as it were, to take for granted the secure possession of an income that, in my case, suggested editors and publishers scrambling over one another to secure interviews with me, and to offer me checks and innocently elaborate luncheons at the Waldorf-Astoria. It was appalling to think of the things that were taken for granted in New York!

By the time we reached the club, our drive had given us fierce appetites. Teddy explained that he had ordered luncheon by telephone and that it would be ready as soon as we sat down. Then he announced that he proposed to give the men a drink, and Cosgrave, Monty, and I followed him to the bar. His eye fell on me as the barkeeper greeted him. "What are you going to have?" he said, and, in a whirl of mental indecision, I replied, with resolution in my voice, "Vichy."

Cosgrave and Monty took Martini cocktails and, to my astonishment, Teddy followed my example. Monty watched him with an amused eye.

"How long is it going to last?" he said, and Teddy replied, as he signed the check, "Till we get to the luncheon table."

Cosgrave seemed eager to return to the porch and I followed him. Teddy and Monty lingered behind. In the absence of the ladies, we both seemed to feel that the two boys were altogether too young for our society.

"Beastly long drive," Cosgrave said, and he passed me a cigar. It looked like Holbrook's cigar and I shook my head. I congratulated myself on being in

a grave and conservative mood. "Still," he resumed, "it's rather good to get into the country at this time of year. I've been shut up in my studio for weeks, working on a portrait that I can't get right. So I decided this morning to forget it."

"It's a good thing to snub your work once in a while," I said.

"Especially when it's been snubbing you," he added, briskly, as if trying to spoil the effect of my epigram, and then, without making a change in his attitude or in the expression of his face, he suddenly lapsed from the conversation. It was as if he had turned on his heel and walked away. On an impulse, I left him and strolled to the other end of the porch. At that moment Mrs. Eustace burst out of the door, and walking straight up to Cosgrave, she said:

"You monster! why did you humiliate me before all those people?"

CHAPTER XI

TEDDY MARKOE MAKES AN APPEAL

OF course, Mrs. Eustace had not seen me, and I did not possess sufficient nerve to indicate that I had heard the remark by shuffling my feet or making any other sound to betray my presence. I did, however, have the decency to turn my head away.

For what seemed to me an interminable time Cosgrave did not speak. I pictured him as nodding in my direction and silencing his companion. But at last he said quietly and deliberately:

"I think you must be out of your senses."

Monty then burst upon the scene, and on seeing him Mrs. Eustace walked around the corner of the porch, followed by Cosgrave. The blue eyes of the boy, usually so innocent, assumed a knowing look. As he approached me, he remarked indifferently: "I wonder what those two people are up to?"

I had a perverse feeling that I must hide from Alice what I had seen, and I tried to convince myself that I ought not to say anything about it—even to her. I tried to justify myself by the thought that I despised gossip; but my literary consciousness at once denied the flattery. I really liked it, though I considered that in my case it rather transcended mere

gossip and became a study of human motives and social procedure. I have never quite dared to voice this justification to Alice, however. In the end, I decided that in this instance concealment would be taking an unfair advantage, especially as Alice never concealed anything of interest from me. Moreover, if I told her at all, I would do well to tell her at the first glance, or she would never forgive me. It was plain enough now that her insight was going to have one of its most triumphant vindications. So, as soon as she appeared on the porch with Letty Henderson and the others, I managed to whisper to her: "I've got something to tell you."

She understood at once and she walked away from me with a nonchalance that expressed her complete approval of my behaviour as a husband. Ever since the first few weeks of our marriage Alice has persistently declared that I hide things from her, and I often have to take the most subtle and elaborate precautions to head off her suspicions. Like an experienced physician, I have learned the superiority of prophylactic measures.

What was said by those two people around the corner of the porch I cannot even surmise, but at the luncheon table I observed that Mrs. Eustace was much less hectic in her appearance and less excited in her talk, and that Cosgrave exerted himself to maintain his share of the conversational burden. They were both trying desperately not to appear self-conscious, and yet I felt sure that every one at the table was watching them. The luncheon proved to be one of those terrible midday meals that make human

Teddy Markoe Makes an Appeal 171

beings seem like ostriches. It was marvellous to me to see the ease with which so much food was put away. I resisted the temptation to eat much, fearing the terrible drowsiness that follows indulgence. To my astonishment, I observed that in the case of most of the others, the more they ate the more lively they became. But perhaps my combination was wrong. It was possibly not the food that stimulated.

It must have been half-past three when we finished eating. When we rose, it was as if each person were lifting three hundred pounds. We walked heavily to the porch and sank again into seats, that is, all but Mrs. Eustace and Cosgrave, who, as if by prearrangement, at once disappeared together among the trees. Their departure gave us all a feeling of consciousness which every one ignored, except the irrepressible little Monty who, raising his eyes heavenward, exclaimed:

"There are times when it is good for the soul to withdraw from life's turmoil."

"Monty, you ought to be spanked," said Mrs. Smith.

I had succeeded in getting near Alice and I managed to say under my breath:

"Did you ever see such eating?"

"It's nothing to what goes on at women's luncheons," I heard her distinctly reply, though her lips did not move and hardly a sound was audible.

Teddy, who had been sitting with outstretched legs and with a surly expression on his face, rose with a determined air. "I'm going out there and smoke under the trees," he said. "It must be as warm as

toast on those dry leaves. See how the sun is pouring on them."

I had refused a cigar at table and he noticed that my hands were hanging limply at each side of my chair. Without a word he drew a cigar from his pocket and passed it to me. I cannot explain why, but I construed this simple act of politeness as an invitation to join him. While I was swiftly debating whether to accept he said lightly, "Don't you want to come along?"

Without replying, I started down the path and he followed.

"After women eat," Teddy astonished me by saying, "they get confidential, and they don't want men around."

"How about Monty?" I asked, smiling.

"Oh, they don't mind him."

Again I smiled and I looked sharply at Teddy; but his face was imperturbable. He must know Monty pretty well, and his remark was strikingly at variance with the opinion I had formed of the little blond youth. Monty might look like a pretty doll; but I had a suspicion that, in spite of his curly hair and his pink cheeks, he was rather assertively masculine.

"You're in the writing business, are n't you?" Teddy said.

Whenever I am directly asked this question, I always feel ashamed. It seems like a reproach.

When I had confessed the truth, Teddy went on, "Is there much money in it?"

Now I don't think that Teddy meant to be super-

Teddy Markoe Makes an Appeal 173

cilious; but when people make this inquiry they are, as a rule, at least patronising. It was against them rather than against Teddy that I felt resentful.

"Well, an acquaintance of mine, a man who writes plays, makes about three thousand dollars a week."

No remark I might possibly have made could have caused Teddy deeper astonishment. "The hell he does!" he said.

I was so pleased with my success that I had to keep still for several minutes in order to enjoy the full relish. It was one of those unpremeditated remarks that, deep down in your heart, you feel you don't deserve credit for. It was as if I had been prompted.

But Teddy brought me down to his level again by this blunt question, "Do you make anything like that?"

"I regret to say that I do not," I replied, feeling very pedantic and cheap.

My words evidently gave Teddy some relief. It was plain that he had not intended to talk with me as millionaire to millionaire. Moreover, his question about my affairs, as I now perceived, was designed as merely preliminary, to lead up to a subject of much more importance in his mind. My reply had thrown the conversation out of joint, had given to a mere detail a sensational character. It was with some difficulty that Teddy recovered from the jolt and took a new route.

"You must have married pretty young," he said.

He would have been astonished if he had known

that so simple and so incontrovertible a remark had made such a hit. I at once softened toward Teddy. All rankling traces of those little references to the rewards of literature were wiped out. I suddenly became voluble.

"Yes, I was pretty young, as married men go nowadays. But I did n't hesitate long about making up my mind, and I've never had a regret."

"How long have you been married?" Teddy asked.

"Three years," I replied with a laugh, not allowing my enthusiasm to be damped by the suspicion of patience in Teddy's tone. "But it seems a good deal longer."

"Longer?" Teddy echoed, in surprise. He was really interested now.

"It seems as if I had always been married. I can't think of myself as not being married."

"Oh!" he said, obviously disappointed. He had plainly expected a more exciting explanation. I perceived, too, that he considered my remark sentimental, though to me it was merely the expression of the most real and practical thing in my life. Nevertheless, he pondered the matter very carefully.

"I suppose that shows you've had a pretty happy marriage."

"It has been happy," I said, with the complacence that I hate in other married men.

"That was the first thing I noticed about you," he went on, faintly smiling. "That is," he corrected, "since I found out that night at the Van Zandts' that you really were married."

"Oh, that incident!" I exclaimed, tossing back my

Teddy Markoe Makes an Appeal 175

head to show that I was making a humorous note of his reference.

"You see," Teddy went on, thrusting out his chin in a way that was expressive but far from beautiful, "I know a good many married people, and I have n't been able to see that they're very happy. But you and your wife seem to hit it off great."

"Well, you must be a mind-reader," I said. "You have n't seen so very much of us."

"Oh, but you can generally tell," he said, carelessly. "There are plenty of ways." He scowled at the scenery on the opposite side of the river. "You can often feel it." He kicked out his legs in a way that suggested impatience with himself. "I suppose I have n't got my knowledge of married life in a very edifying sort of way, and perhaps it's sort of clouded my views a little. But I believe in happy marriages!" he exclaimed with his comic doggedness.

He ran his fingers into his hair, and in the fierce sunlight I noticed that his forehead was painfully creased, like a middle-aged man's. Around his eyes, too, were the premature and preliminary marks of age. He was plainly suffering, not from any profound cause, I suspected, but simply because, unused to diplomacy, he was in a situation where he felt he must try to be diplomatic.

"Did you have much experience before you were married?" Teddy suddenly asked.

It struck me as exceedingly impertinent of this boy to pry into my affairs, even by way of getting at his own interests. Teddy waited with serene unconsciousness till I was ready to speak.

"When a man marries," I said at last, "and marries happily, everything of a sentimental nature that has happened before seems trifling."

"Oh!" said Teddy, and I thought his tone was satirical. At any rate, it brought me down from my high plane.

"It's this way with me," Teddy went on, with the air of finding any one but himself an unprofitable and disappointing topic. "I suppose I've been what you'd call 'spoiled' all my life. I've had plenty of money and I've had my own way ever since I can remember. My father used to think it was smart when I'd turn on my nurse and try to hit her with my fist. I suppose that was his idea of being manly. Well, the fact is, I've changed my ideas a good deal lately—ever since I began to be interested in Letty Henderson."

He looked at me to study the effect of this statement. In order to punish him for saying "Oh," in that contemptuous way, I made my face blank and I said nothing. Of course, he wanted to find out if I was surprised.

"I don't know whether you've noticed," he said, in a tone so meek that I came near softening toward him again.

"No, I had n't," I carelessly replied, and I thought of all the times I had accused Alice of acting.

"Well, your wife knows," Teddy announced, and I felt as if I had been caught.

"Why do you think that?" I asked in what I endeavoured to make a purely neutral tone.

Teddy laughed. Again I had the feeling of infer-

Teddy Markoe Makes an Appeal 177

iority that Alice gives me when she voices her subtle perceptions. Teddy was obviously finding me less clever than he had expected me to be. He leaned forward and began to prod the soft earth with a twig.

"Well, you see, till lately Letty—she's been—well, she's nice to every one. It would be hard for her to throw any one down—openly, I mean. I knew all along that she did n't have much use for me. I suppose she's heard all kinds of yarns about me—and then, perhaps she did n't—well, anyway, till to-day—" Teddy gave vent to his feelings in a sigh that was almost a groan. "I can feel all the time that those two women are against me."

"Of course I can't tell," I said, with shameless deceit, and I noticed that my words sounded as casual and sincere as when I expressed the most commonplace truth. After all, it was a singularly easy thing to be a liar; the great trouble was, that to get into the habit of lying, especially about trifles, would tend to destroy your confidence in all other human beings; what was so easy for oneself, must be easy for others, too.

"You see, I can talk with *you*," Teddy resumed. "But I'm afraid of your wife."

"Oh, there's nothing to be afraid of about my wife," I said, reassuringly.

"Perhaps not," said Teddy, with a significance that I may possibly have read into his tone. And then it flashed upon me that Teddy was merely trying to use me to influence Alice. My self-esteem sank several degrees.

"Your wife is very sympathetic and kind," Teddy continued, "and then," he ruthlessly added, "she's older than Letty. I can see that Letty admires her and looks up to her. Now *I* think your wife is great," he concluded, as if defending Alice from an implication of mediocrity.

He waited for me to help him out; but as, throughout the conversation, he had been holding on rather hard to the advantage, I simply waited. There are moments in conversation when the silence of one person can be mighty upsetting to the other person.

"Now, as your wife is so much older," Teddy resumed, with an unconsciousness that softened my desire to kick him, "and knows so much more about the world," he happily added, "it seemed to me that if she understood just how I felt she would n't be quite so hard on me."

"Oh, she is n't hard on you!" I exclaimed, and my tone was so genial and sincere that for a moment it seemed as if I were speaking the exact truth. To allay any possible suspicion on his part, I added: "My wife is very lenient about every one," and with this thought I was so touched that I felt emotion in my throat.

"She's given me an awful roast to-day."

"How?" I asked, sitting up. This time I was really astonished.

"Oh, during the whole meal up there," Teddy replied, nodding in the direction of the club-house. "I could feel it every minute."

"I don't think she could have meant it," I insisted, and then, to my amazement, I saw Teddy's

Teddy Markoe Makes an Appeal 179

eyes fill with tears. He kept his head down, and he waited a long time before he spoke again.

"It's hit me kind of hard, I guess. You see, I never wanted anything quite so much as I've wanted that girl to like me. And to feel that everything I do, everything about me, is unpleasant to her,—why, if I look at her, she seems to shrink away. Honest, she does."

"Ah!" I said. "You've made one great mistake."

"What's that?" he asked with an eagerness that, for the moment, made his hardened face look ingenuous.

"You've rushed her." Teddy looked at me with parted lips and with distress in his eyes. He was plainly impressed and he waited for more wisdom to fall from my lips. "You've allowed her to see from the start how much you cared. That always frightens a girl."

"A girl like *her*?" he exclaimed, and he showed that he grossly misunderstood my state of mind by adding: "A nice girl, do you mean?"

"They're just the kind I mean."

"Of course, I know," he impatiently exclaimed, "that you have to play a game with the other kind. The more indifferent you are, the more crazy they are to get you—or your money," he added with scorn.

I felt a sudden disgust for him: it seemed odious that, with reference to Letty Henderson, there should be any talk about "the other kind." And then I perceived how with men like Teddy, "the other kind" must always be associated in their minds with the women they respected. When women married men

like Teddy they inevitably classed themselves with "the other kind."

"I've been in some pretty bad scrapes in my life," said Teddy, and the words sounded as if they came from a man advanced in years. I looked at him to make sure that he was really young: yes, in spite of the sallowness of the skin and those premature lines, youth dwelt in his face. "I've been in some pretty bad scrapes," he repeated, grimly, "and I've had a good deal of experience; but, Gee, when I first began to be interested in that girl, it seemed as if I had n't learned anything."

I made a great effort not to smile. He was so hopelessly at a disadvantage that I just waited.

"It was that night at the Van Zandts': I could n't help noticing how sweet she was to everybody—everybody but me. I can see," he went on, as if thinking aloud, "that I showed my hand too plainly. I tried all kinds of stunts, auto-rides, invitations to lunch, the theatre, and all that. I even tried to make myself solid with the old folks. Well, I guess I did that all right. Not that they care anything about *me!*" he contemptuously exclaimed.

"You ought to have gone slow," I sententiously remarked.

"I suppose you think I'm a big chump to tell you all this. But I had an idea—well, on account of your business, writing love-stories all the time—I thought you'd understand."

Again I had the feeling of depression that so frequently afflicts me when people, not literary themselves, refer to the noble calling of letters. So often,

Teddy Markoe Makes an Appeal 181

like Teddy, they place authors on a plane with man-milliners or actors, with the "non-producers" of life. It merely happened that in this sentimental crisis Teddy could not appeal to his lawyer, or to the manager of his stock-farm or to his broker.

While I was ruminating, Teddy kept straight on: "Up to lately, I've never taken any of my love-affairs very seriously, and I used to think I never would. I'd made up my mind that it did n't pay. It would interfere too much with other things."

"Such as what?"

"Well, the things I really cared about, looking after my horses and my farm and all that. I'm going to have the finest stock-farm in the country one day and I'm going to breed the best blooded horses. That's my ambition—or it was. I thought it would be enough. But lately I seem to have lost interest in everything. Of course, I don't mean that exactly—but, well, you know what I mean."

"Ah, yes, I do know," I said, stretching out my arms, and then the impudent boy asked:

"Did you have to go through a hard time, too?"

I sat up and kept my eyes turned from him. I felt indignant and yet amused.

"All people who are in love go through practically the same experience."

I knew that this statement was not true; but it sounded so epigrammatic and wise that I could n't help saying it. And, having said it, I had to stick to it, though Teddy was looking at me with a puzzled and suspicious expression.

"The deuce they do!" he said. His tone conveyed

a deep fear that his unhappiness might not be exceptional, after all. It was hard enough to be unlucky; but it was much worse to be told there was no such thing as luck.

"Of course, I don't mean," I hastened to explain in order to redeem myself, "that all people in love are unhappy; but they all go through periods of unhappiness."

"Oh!" he said, in a long breath of relief. I saw now that I had a hold on him: he felt so abject I could say almost anything.

At this point I had an emotional reaction. I accused myself of taking a mean advantage of Teddy. When I spoke again, my tone had lost its former tinge of patronage.

"There's only one thing to do," I said, and, under these words, it was pitiful to see Teddy revive. He was looking for a miracle to keep him out of trouble, as even the least superstitious people do. I let him revel in hope for a few moments.

"That is, to wait," I explained.

"To wait!" he gasped, cast back into the depths. "And let some other fellow get her?"

"There are risks in all enterprises," I remarked, and again I felt ashamed. That first epigram had been too much for my self-control and I was exploiting myself at Teddy's expense. "As a matter of fact," I went on precipitately, "I don't think Miss Henderson is the sort of girl that cares much for men. Any one can see she's not had much experience."

"Oh, I hate women that have had experience,"

Teddy Markoe Makes an Appeal 183

Teddy lamented. "They make me sick. That's why I like Letty Henderson—she's so gentle, and good, and unaffected. Of course, her father's not much use and her mother—well, she's like a good many women that try to keep up in New York without having any money. I don't mind all that. They can have my money—as much as they need. All I want is to settle down away from this beastly New York—with some one that likes a quiet life. The stock-farm would suit me all right."

"That part of it, I believe she'd like," I said, and I did n't realise till I had spoken how brutal my words were. "I know she does n't care much for society."

Teddy turned the lime-light on my speech. He was in the mood to take a fiendish pleasure in inflicting pain on himself.

"Yes, she'd like the stock-farm if I did n't go with it."

"You must wait," I repeated, with firmness.

"And do nothing?"

"Have you talked with her?" I asked, and he understood at once.

"She won't give me a chance. But—" he sheepishly added, "I have talked with her mother."

"Promised to reform and all that?" I felt very much at ease with Teddy at this moment. My tone was patriarchal. The fever, the uncertainty, the agony and the ecstasy of love—they all seemed far away from me now. I rested in a safe harbour. It was much better, much surer!

"Well, something like that," Teddy grunted.

"I can tell you this," I said, and I blamed myself for not having offered the comfort before. "Letty Henderson is heart-whole. That's something."

Teddy at once showed that to him it really was something. But, having been disappointed before, he felt suspicious of the comfort.

"How do you know?" he asked, and while I was trying to prepare an answer to this poser he became more definite: "Has she told your wife so?"

Teddy's definiteness reduced my sympathy and made me shy away. I became controlled by what I can only regard now as a false modesty. Did this love-sick youth suppose that I was going to betray any of our family confidences?

"One can nearly always tell," I remarked, and in proportion to my superiority, Teddy became depressed.

"Oh, if that's all you know about it!" he rudely exclaimed. Then he actually rolled on the ground. "Oh, I wish I was dead!" he cried out.

"Look here, my boy!" I said, breaking through all reserve, "no wonder you have n't had any luck with that girl! If she were to see you now and hear you talk, do you suppose she'd have any respect for you? Just because a nice girl does n't fall down before you, you begin to howl and say you wish you were dead."

Teddy sat up straight. "I guess you're right," he said. "I'm a damn fool. But I've never let go quite so bad before," he went on. "The fact is, my nerves must be unstrung. I've been trying to knock off drinking, and I've been in too much of a hurry."

Teddy Markoe Makes an Appeal 185

"Well, you'd better take a good stiff drink the first chance you get."

Teddy looked at me steadily for a long time. Then he laughed. "Do you know what I thought of you when I first met you and heard what your business was? I thought you were soft. I thought you were one of those *dilettante* fellows that hang around at afternoon-teas and take girls out to Art Exhibitions."

"M'm!" I said. If some people could only know the sensational effect their most humorous or casual words make on others!

"Do you care for sport?" Teddy asked, as if in celebration of his discovery that I was a real man.

"Oh, yes," I replied, with an indifference designed to rebuke him.

"Will you come down to my place some time—the stock-farm—and bring your wife?"

"You'd better ask my wife first," I said with a smile.

"I'd like that first-rate," Teddy went on enthusiastically, as if the visit were completely arranged. But he damaged the effect by adding: "I wish I could persuade Miss Henderson to come too. Perhaps she would," he hopefully concluded, "if your wife came."

I reflected that for frank, outspoken selfishness, I had never met Teddy's equal. And yet I could not help liking the fellow.

"I've got some corking good horses down there." Teddy's eyes shone. He had one of those intervals of relief from his love-sickness that nature so mercifully grants to all sickness and pain. "You'll be

tickled to death with them. I'm going to have some of them up for the Horse Show next week. By the way, you and your wife must use my box." He hesitated, evidently planning ahead, with the swiftness of a great executive talent. "How about the first night? Are you and your wife free? Perhaps your wife would get up a box-party. Perhaps some one else——"

"We're free," I interrupted, "and I'd like to go first-rate."

"Now Miss Henderson——" Teddy broke in.

"Wait just a minute. Don't rush up and ask Miss Henderson this minute. Why not let her take a breath or two between your attentions?"

For an instant Teddy looked angry. Then he calmed down.

"I'll leave the whole business to your wife—if she'll do it," he said humbly.

"Now one more bit of advice," I said, and as I spoke I had a wretched sense that I was in some way doing what amounted to disloyalty to Alice and to Letty Henderson too. "Many a man has lost a girl by being too solicitous. Be as indifferent to Miss Henderson as you can without snubbing her too much. She'll notice the change and it will pique her."

Who is it, I wonder, who first wrote about "the war of the sexes"? Was I, by my championing of Teddy, taking a natural and inevitable part in that war? Was I favouring him just because he belonged to my sex? I liked Letty Henderson and yet I was conspiring against her. I was taking what might be the first step toward an entanglement that she would

Teddy Markoe Makes an Appeal 187

regret all her life. I deplored the weakness that had made me encourage Teddy. It would have been far better to be honest and discouraging.

We scrambled to our feet and walked up the steep path. Just as we were about to emerge into the open, we saw through the trees, only a few yards away, two figures on a rustic seat: the handsome Mr. Cosgrave looked ill-at-ease and surly, and his companion was pressing a handkerchief to her eyes. Teddy fixed his gaze on the pair and grunted. "Awful ruffian, that fellow!" he said, glancing quickly away, as if the sight recalled painful associations. Then he added: "I'm afraid that woman's making a fool of herself. I should think by this time she'd know better. She's been through enough."

CHAPTER XII

OUR RETURN TO NEW YORK

AS we neared the club-house, we met Alice and Letty Henderson and Lily Valentine walking toward us. "Well, I don't think you're very polite," Miss Valentine called out, plainly addressing me. Without waiting for me to reply, she continued: "Here I thought we were going to have a beautiful talk about our great comedy."

"Let us have it now," I replied, with an attempt to be cheerful, though I instantly realised the double complication I was creating.

"I'm afraid we are in the way," said Alice in a tone so perfectly good-humoured that I inwardly quaked.

"There's a ripping view where we were sitting," Teddy cut in, with an eagerness altogether at variance with my instructions. "Suppose we go down there while these two people talk over their play."

"Oh, but we must n't go without—" Alice turned and waved her hand to Monty, who was standing on the porch. The boy instantly ran toward us.

"I thought you were going to abandon me to the old ladies," he gasped, and Alice, without glancing at Lily Valentine or me, started down the hill. Letty Henderson gave me a parting smile, which made me

feel a little more comfortable. It was curious, but at that moment I hated the thought of talking about the play. It seemed somehow inappropriate. The fact was, I suppose, that I wished to get away with Alice and talk over Teddy's revelations.

"Now let us squat right down here," said Miss Valentine, and she gracefully dropped on the turf, tucking her pretty little feet under the edge of her gown. "We sha'n't scandalise the tabby-cats by going off alone and we can get to work."

Miss Valentine laughed into my face and authoritatively patted her dress to indicate that she was about to start the discussion of business. "I've been thinking of our play every minute," she said. "It's so nice to have something serious to think about while a lot of silly people are around you, is n't it?" For the moment she seemed to have forgotten that I was Alice's husband. "That's one advantage of being with a lot of women. I do my hardest thinking then." She nervously twisted and went on with a change of tone: "Now I have a beautiful idea. Suppose, instead of your writing the play with Walter Hart, suppose you write it with me."

"With you?" I gasped, and I had an impulse to dash down the hill to Alice for protection. It was all up with that play of mine!

Miss Valentine briskly nodded. "I've always been crazy to write a play—especially since I've known Walter Hart. If it's so easy for him, why can't other people do it? I believe it's very largely a knack. He's got into the habit of it, and that's how he turns them out so fast. Why, at rehearsal,

I've seen him sit in the wings or on an old property-table with a pad on his knee and write out a whole scene—with all those funny little twists in the speeches and in the business that he's so wonderful at. I'm sure we could do it," Miss Valentine confidently insisted.

I had a maudlin impulse to weep. And only a few minutes before I had been so grand with Teddy! Here I was, an author, at the mercy of this self-important little actress! She knew I was so crazy to get a play produced that she thought she could do anything with me.

As she kept her eyes fixed on my face, I had to speak. So I said, in desperation, trying to keep my voice from sounding contemptuous: "Why don't you take the book yourself, Miss Valentine, and make a play out of it?"

"Alone?" she gasped, and I perceived that I had made a master-stroke. I looked straight ahead, over the tops of the trees.

"Don't you think you could do it?" I asked quietly, and Miss Valentine burst out laughing.

"You don't want to collaborate with me, do you?"

"Do you really think we could accomplish anything?" I asked.

"I could help a lot in practical ways," she argued, almost pleadingly. "That's what is so hard at the beginning."

"How did Hart learn?" I asked.

"Oh, how *did* he learn? That's the marvel. He's like those people who can play the most wonderful things on the piano without ever taking lessons.

Of course," Miss Valentine went on archly, "you may be an improviser, too." Before I had time to assert my innate modesty, she was flying ahead: "I want to play something with a little depth to it and, from your scenario, I can see that there are some beautifully pathetic scenes to be worked up for Francesca. I know I can't do heavy things yet—though some day I am determined to do Lady Macbeth. You think that's silly, don't you? Perhaps it is. But, nearly every night just before I go to bed, I practise the sleep-walking scene. Oh, you may laugh as much as you like," she pouted.

It was a great relief to my feelings to laugh, though to my ears the sound seemed forced. After all, Lily Valentine was a mere child. Her pretty face, the whim of a manager, and chance had converted her, while she ought to be at school, into a theatrical celebrity.

"But now let's not talk about *me*," she resumed. "Let's talk about our wonderful play. Now I'll tell you in the greatest confidence that I don't believe we can possibly make a go of the miserable thing Walter Hart has done for me. Sometimes he can fool them; but lately—Why, do you know, three of his plays have failed, one after the other? People are getting tired of his way of looking at life, and, in the country, they simply don't know what to make of it. By 'the country,' you know, I mean places like Providence, and Scranton, and McKeesport. Have you ever been in McKeesport? Oh, dear!"

"What was your idea about collaborating?" I meekly asked.

"Well, I want to own the play outright. That will make me more independent of Holbrook."

"Ah!" I said, but inaudibly.

"As things are now, I am at his mercy. I make a play a success, and when I get through with it he owns it, and he can send it out with some other actress, who makes a lot of money for him. And then, of course, his owning my plays gives him a great hold on me."

"If you don't look out, you'll be managing yourself one of these days!" I said warningly.

"If I only could!" Miss Valentine exclaimed. "What bliss! To be perfectly free—like a man!"

"Are n't you free now?"

"Free!" the girl echoed. "I'm the greatest slave in the world. Everybody interferes with me. When it is n't Holbrook, it's Walter Hart, and when it is n't Walter Hart it's Mrs. Smith or one of the girls at home or some wretched reporter who says that I'm engaged to somebody. Last season my engagement was announced to seven men—one of them my leading-man. I had n't spoken to him since the first night—he was so jealous of my success and so hateful. He was tickled almost to death when the announcement was made in the newspapers. He knew it would make me so cross. But come now," she said, with a petulant change of tone, "we do get so *personal*, you and I, don't we? The custom is, as you may know, to pay five hundred dollars in advance." The voice of the actress grew remote and measured; she herself seemed to have receded several feet. "Of course, a man like Walter Hart gets a

good deal more. Holbrook paid him ten thousand dollars before he even thought of the scenario for my play. Now if you and I work together, we ought to make some sort of division. The scenario is yours and you'll probably do most of the writing, though some of the scenes I shall want to do myself. Anyway, I will pay you five hundred dollars in advance, just as if you were going to do the play alone, and, after that, we'll divide the usual five per cent. royalty of the gross receipts into two parts, two thirds for you and one third for me. Your five hundred will, of course, be deducted from the royalties of the first performances."

I had a curious impulse to lie back on the ground and roll, exactly as I had seen Teddy do a short time before. But I don't think that even the muscles around my mouth twitched. I considered the proposition with ponderous gravity. Then I uttered this sententious remark, looking up as wise people are supposed to do when about to make a pronouncement:

"I will think the matter over, Miss Valentine."

"Oh!" said the actress, with disappointment in her tone. Then she added: "Think of all the money people make by writing plays. It's ever so much more profitable than the story-writing business."

"I know, I know," I said impatiently, and I thought of the little house in the country that Alice and I were to have. I felt as if the actress were trying to place a heavy mortgage on it. I visualised it as a low, rambling, old-fashioned house, with simple white muslin curtains at the windows, and with a

barn at the back. Then I saw the mortgage descend on it like a cloud, slowly, slowly, till it was obliterated from sight.

"And then," the actress went on, "when you make one success, you're sure to get plenty of chances to do other plays. Walter Hart simply turns away offers."

"I'll talk with my wife about it," I said, and Miss Valentine appeared so surprised and alarmed that I went on with an unconsciousness of acting that, as I look back at it, strikes me as sublime: "I never make any contracts without consulting my wife." As I spoke, I seemed fairly to swell with virtuous loyalty. I felt like a model husband. I was like those actors who identify themselves with heroic *rôles* while walking down Broadway.

At that moment Alice came up the hill, followed by Letty Henderson with Monty and Teddy. They were talking and laughing in the merriest way. Teddy looked younger and more innocent than I had ever seen him.

"It's nearly time to start back," Miss Henderson exclaimed, and Lily Valentine, leaping to her feet, replied:

"Was n't there some talk about tea a little while ago?"

"Where's Mrs. Eustace?" Letty Henderson asked.

"There she is on the porch!" Monty cried, with astonishment in his tone. Then he added: "They must have started around by the hill to keep out of our way."

"Does n't it seem as if we had eaten about two

minutes ago?" Lily Valentine vexatiously asked. Then she drew close to me and said in a low voice: "Now you will let me hear from you as soon as you can, won't you? Perhaps you can come around to the theatre to-night."

I did not have a chance to reply, for a noisy colloquy began between our little group and the older people on the porch. They reproached us with having kept them from their tea. They all seemed tired and cross, with the exception of Mrs. Eustace, whose face fairly beamed on us.

The air had grown chill and we went into the house for tea, sinking into wicker chairs in front of a big open-fire. "I hope we sha'n't freeze to death going home," Mrs. Smith exclaimed.

"There is a moment," I heard Cosgrave whisper to Alice, "when festivities like this ought suddenly to cease. Don't you remember that clever actor who used to obliterate scenes in his plays by plunging them suddenly into darkness? It was an ingenious device and wonderfully effective. Well, festivities ought to end like that, before people get bored to death."

"What would happen to the people?" Alice asked with her clear common-sense.

"Oh, we ought to be able to obliterate ourselves at will. It would be a great comfort at times," the painter replied, lifting a cup of tea from the tray the waiter was passing.

"I should think it might be a great convenience," Alice said in the short, dry tone with which she replies to people whose talk seems to her insincere or foolish.

"Do you know, I think you're wonderfully original?" Cosgrave said, and I felt so irritable that I rose from my seat and walked straight over to the place beside a corner of the fireplace where Letty Henderson was sitting.

"Have you enjoyed the day?" she asked, and as I was about to make a wry face, I realised that it would seem rude. So I said as pleasantly as I could:

"It has given me some things to think over."

She grew pensive. Finally she remarked in a low voice: "It has given me some things to think over, too."

Teddy had disappeared, and in a few minutes the coach was at the door. By some manœuvring, on whose part I could not make out, Cosgrave was placed beside Alice and I sat with Mrs. Eustace and Miss Henderson. The air was growing steadily colder, with the dampness of late autumn. As we swept down the hills the sun was majestically setting behind the Palisades. The horses seemed to share our eagerness to reach New York and we fairly dashed along the road. With a thrill I saw the lights of the city welcoming us in the distance and growing nearer and nearer. It was a positive joy to reach Fifth Avenue again and to bowl along past the crowd of pedestrians, racing madly up-town.

When we reached the Holland House we were numb from sitting so long in the cold air. It was uncanny to leap to the sidewalk and to feel the earth moving unsteadily underfoot. We all seemed actuated by a powerful desire to escape. Our good-byes were said with forced laughter. I thought of Kant's

statement that human beings really hate one another, but feel an irresistible desire for the society of their kind. It was terrible to me to think of going to the Hendersons' to dinner. I longed to take Alice on my arm and bolt. I pined for the sight of our little apartment, and I even thought of Mary with affection.

"You won't forget about the sitting to-morrow," I heard Cosgrave say to Alice as we were trying to break away.

"Oh, no!" Alice replied, with a truly distressful gaiety. I knew she was dead tired; but she would n't give up or relax till we reached home, no matter what the cost might be.

"I'll come for you at eleven o'clock," Mrs. Eustace called out after us.

When we reached the house, we passed into a dimly lighted, narrow hall and up a green-carpeted staircase. "I'm going to take you into my room, Alice, dear," said Miss Henderson, "and let you have a good rest. There!" she cried, throwing open the door at the head of the stairs. "You'll have at least half an hour and no one shall come near you. I'll go and see mamma!"

She disappeared like a sprite and I followed Alice into the room. I noticed that it was all in blue with many fancy ornamentations, a typical girl's room.

I closed the door carefully and I stood with my back pressed against it.

"What do you think?" I said. "That little actress wants to collaborate with me."

Alice had made a bee-line for the mirror and was making a careful study of the way she had been appearing before the others. She slowly drew the hat-pins from her hat. Then she lifted her hat from her head and drew off her jacket.

"Well?" I said.

"I'm not surprised," Alice replied.

"What do you suppose she's up to?"

"An advertisement, naturally," Alice replied in a tone that rebuked the absurdity of the question. Then she added: "But that's only one reason."

"What else?"

"I suppose she wants the whole play to herself. That's why she's dissatisfied with her present play. The part is n't good enough." Alice smiled wearily. "She wants to keep you from making the mistake Walter Hart made."

"So she is n't really looking for a play?" I helplessly interpreted. "She's looking for a great part. She wants to be the whole show."

"Well, naturally," Alice agreed, impatient at being obliged to discuss so obvious a matter.

Alice walked toward me with a look of impatience in her face; she was plainly eager to go on to another subject.

"What was it you were going to tell me?" she said. "Something about Mrs. Eustace and Cosgrave."

"Oh!" Faced with this question, I felt ashamed. How could I gossip about those people even with Alice? "I happened to catch them in the middle of a tiff," I replied.

"M'm!" said Alice, with a frown. "It was dis-

graceful—the whole thing,” she added, in a manner that asked me to let the subject remain closed.

“I’m sorry you made that appointment,” I ventured, removing my coat and throwing it on a chair.

“I simply could n’t get out of it,” Alice retorted.

“I don’t like your being mixed up with those people.”

“Oh, I can take care of myself, my dear. Besides——”

“Besides what?”

“I pity *her*.”

I was about to say, “What has that got to go with it?” But Alice cut in with, “What in the world did you and Teddy have to say to each other?”

“Oh!” For the moment I had forgotten that little talk. When I narrated it to Alice, she listened, her eyes big with astonishment.

“Why did n’t you tell me that before?” she asked, indignantly, and I saw that her interest in Teddy’s sentimental disclosures eclipsed every other event of the day, even that absurd suggestion of Lily Valentine’s!

CHAPTER XIII

A GLIMPSE OF LETTY'S HOME LIFE

WHEN Letty Henderson came to the door, she wore a simple white-muslin frock that made her look hardly more than sixteen.

"Mamma is waiting to see you," she said, addressing Alice, and we followed her down the steps. I wonder why it was that I had a guilty feeling and why I suspected that Mrs. Henderson was not nearly so eager to see us as her daughter had represented.

Whatever may have been the truth, Mrs. Henderson received us most graciously. To my astonishment I found her very like Letty, only damaged, terribly damaged. In the mother, the girl's willowy slimness had been emphasised into rigidity, into what impressed me as an irresistible determination to be slim, and Letty's ethereal blondness had assumed, in Mrs. Henderson's hair and complexion, a vivid glow that was of neither earth nor heaven. In fact, the mother of that exquisite creature, that child, as she seemed to me at the moment, was shamelessly dyed and made up, and the artificiality, by contrasting the appearance of youth that she undertook to achieve and the ineffaceable signs of her age, made her seem distressingly old at one moment and distressingly young at another. Her costume was uncompromis-

A Glimpse of Letty's Home Life 201

ingly young, of pink silk, tight-fitting, and revealing a really beautiful throat and neck. I marvelled that, for us, she should array herself so elaborately.

The remarks that followed our greetings consisted of the neutral talk by which people try to glean impressions of one another. It speedily became plain that Mrs. Henderson had pigeon-holed me to her satisfaction and was finding Alice more difficult. As Alice made faintly satirical comments on the events of the day, Mrs. Henderson's eyes, in observing her, seemed to grow bluer and keener and smaller.

Presently a tall handsome man, with thin brown hair and smooth face, strode into the room. In evening-dress as he was, he nevertheless had the air of a general, as generals appear on the stage. His shoulders were splendidly broad; his air was nobly resolute; from his large grey eyes and his finely cut features there seemed to radiate a generous sympathy for the whole human race. To my astonishment, Mrs. Henderson greeted him as if she did not know him very well and had not seen him for some time. "Good-evening, Mr. Henderson," she said.

He replied with a low bow and a sonorous "Good-evening, my dear." Before his wife had time to speak the words of introduction, he turned deferentially to Alice and extended his hand. He held the hand, placing his left hand over it, while his wife explained that Alice was one of Letty's friends. "I am always delighted to meet any of Letty's friends," he said impressively, and he patted Alice's fingers with what was doubtless designed to appear as paternal affection. He greeted me with a warmth only

slightly modified. As I sat in my seat again, somewhat overcome by this welcome, a young man in evening-dress, with a round pink face and light curly hair, entered the room. Supposing him to be a guest, I rose quickly. Mrs. Henderson rose, too, and I heard the young man say in a low voice, "Dinner is served, Madame."

"Let us go in at once," Mrs. Henderson said, and as we followed quite informally I realised that she was covering up my blunder. The consciousness of the blunder would have made me uneasy and silent if Henderson had not at once drawn me into talk.

"You are a fortunate man to be able to take a holiday at this time of year," he said. "Ah, how I envy those people who are able to stop working for a time! We are all work-mad. I never have an hour of the day to myself. All I've had to eat to-day was a sandwich that I sent out for from the floor of the Exchange."

Neither Mrs. Henderson nor her daughter seemed to be saddened by this remark. They acted as if they had heard it, or something like it, many times before.

An atmosphere of gloom suddenly enveloped the table. Alice looked scared. Like me, I perceived that she was wondering what we had got into.

"I suppose you are down-town," Henderson carelessly remarked, and before I could reply, he went on rapidly: "Now I have n't asked you what you're going to drink. My dear Mrs. Foster——" He leaned forward obsequiously.

Letty's mother cut in, with an air that was curi-

A Glimpse of Letty's Home Life 203

ously defiant. "We drink claret and Scotch whisky and beer, Mrs. Foster. We have some claret that is rather good. I always drink it at dinner."

"I don't think I will drink anything," Alice calmly replied.

Henderson bent his head toward me with the solicitude that I had begun to hate and dread. "Since Mrs. Henderson has confessed her preference," he said, and the tone of his voice rather than the words conveyed the rebuke of sarcasm, "I will confess mine. I always drink Scotch."

"I'll drink some Scotch with you," I said, and that preliminary disposed of, we went on more comfortably. The impressive-looking butler brought on a simple meal; but everything, including the lobster croquettes, was beautifully cooked and served. Henderson talked almost incessantly, chiefly about himself. As I had surmised, he was a stock-broker and a promoter, and, as the meal proceeded and as he took steady draughts of the Scotch, he made it plain that, in spite of his air of opulence, he belonged to the great army of the disappointed and the embittered. I had been prevented from explaining that I was not a business-man and he accepted me as one worthy of hearing his comments on the leaders of finance in New York. Those comments were exceedingly uncomplimentary and they were obviously familiar to his wife, for as she listened she languished.

"We are going to have a terrible upheaval in this country some day," said Henderson, "and it's going to have its start right here in New York. Do you realise" he cried, with excitement, "that during the

past ten years in Pittsburgh alone as many as a hundred millionaires have sprung up—a hundred millionaires?” he emphatically concluded.

“Well, the poor things deserve it for having to live in Pittsburgh,” said Mrs. Henderson.

“They don’t live in Pittsburgh after they make their money,” Henderson testily retorted.

“That’s where they show their good sense,” Mrs. Henderson went on, with a serenity that gave me a nervous impulse to laugh. “They come straight to New York.”

“Well, New York is no place for a man unless he has at least a million,” Henderson grumbled. Then he raised his voice again. “This state of affairs can’t keep on going as it’s been doing for the past twenty-five years. The people will rise up. They must. If they had any sense, they’d have risen up long ago. They’re being robbed, systematically robbed.”

“Oh, Frank, it is n’t any worse now than it’s always been,” said Mrs. Henderson, impatiently. “Business has always been an organised system of robbery. It’s simply that the cleverest people get the most.”

Henderson made no reply. His attitude expressed the familiar masculine idea that women were always silly when they discussed business.

When we had finished dessert, Mrs. Henderson rose from the table and said that we would take coffee in the drawing-room. I noticed that we all seemed fatigued—all but Henderson. The talk that had exhausted us left him strong. In the drawing-room he seemed to get a second wind and he fell into a more

A Glimpse of Letty's Home Life 205

amiable mood. As soon as he had taken his coffee, he announced that he must leave us.

"I'm so very sorry," he said to Alice, "but I'm due at a boresome political-club meeting. You'll forgive me, won't you?"

Alice at once adopted her casual manner. "We shall have to go directly ourselves. We've had such a long day."

Henderson pinched his daughter's cheek. "By-by, little one," he said, and the girl blushed, for shame, I thought. Then he turned to his wife: "Are you off too?" he asked, with a cold glance at her dress. She answered him by speaking directly to Alice.

"I wish I could have known you were coming when I made my engagement for to-night. The Drapers are having some of the opera people at their house and I promised Mrs. Draper——"

"Ah, but Letty knows we could n't stay," Alice remarked, and away went Henderson, and five minutes later Alice and I were walking down the steps.

For the sake of complete discretion I walked for at least five yards before speaking.

"Well, if that was n't the limit!" I exclaimed.

"Poor Letty!" Alice murmured.

"But the marvel is how *she* ever happened!"

"In that interior!" Alice echoed. Then she quickly added: "The mother is n't so bad. That is, if she had plenty of money, she would n't *seem* so bad. The trouble is she's been a great beauty and she's been admired and spoiled. She has n't anything to live for but her beauty, displaying it

and ornamenting it. And she's worrying it away every minute of her life. Of course, it's the husband."

"I should think having him around the house would spoil any beauty."

"He's the sort of man who would impress some people tremendously. When he was young he must have fooled a lot of people—besides *her*. What an awful responsibility for Letty!"

At this point I lost the clue. "I can't see how Letty is responsible."

"For his future, I mean. Could n't you see from the bitter way he spoke about those Wall Street men that they hadn't any use for him? It's wonderful how he keeps up in this dreadfully expensive city. I must say now that I have more respect for Teddy. Think of being willing to stand for that artificial mother and that empty-headed father. Really there must be a lot of good in Teddy."

But at that moment I did not feel like discussing Teddy. He seemed far away.

For a long time we walked on in silence. Then I said: "I hope that Mary has had a good day."

That remark roused Alice. Her mind had evidently been wandering far from our little flat, and she at once began to worry. As we neared the house she accused herself for staying away so long. The outbreak of the self-accusing habit is one of Alice's signs of extreme nervousness.

There was not the sign of light in our apartment and we fairly ran up-stairs. By this time I had caught some of Alice's agitation. I unlocked the

A Glimpse of Letty's Home Life 207

door and plunged into pitch darkness. In a few minutes the place was brilliantly lighted.

"Oh!" Alice exclaimed.

My masculine senses had detected nothing. The place seemed to be in perfect order.

"Something dreadful has happened," Alice tragically whispered.

At that moment an apparition stood at the kitchen door, a bedraggled, blear-eyed, frowsy caricature of humanity, bearing a degraded resemblance to Mary. Alice stood in horror, speechless. In a few seconds Mary came unsteadily toward us.

"Good-evening, Mary," Alice said with a ghastly pretence of being pleasant. Mary turned her blear eyes on Alice's face; they blinked as if blinded by the light; then they filled with tears.

"Oh, my darlin' child, this is a terrible sight fer yer."

"It is a terrible sight, Mary." Alice spoke steadily and with dignity.

"Sure 't is ashamed, I am, an' ye've been so good to me."

"I trusted you, Mary," said Alice, with a grandeur of utterance that gave me a wild impulse to laugh.

"Don't I know that?" Mary exclaimed reproachfully, as if a deadly insult had been hurled at her.

"An' don't I know that you're the sweetest creature that ever breathed, with never a cross word from mornin' till night no matter how things goes wrong. An' obliged to live with the most awful crank that ever walked the earth, always complainin' an' good

fer nothin' an' never doin' a stroke of work, sittin' up with his books like a fine gentleman. It's too good he thinks he is to go out an' earn an honest livin' with his two hands!"

Shall I be believed when I say that my first sensation on hearing these words was one of great relief? At last, I knew what Mary thought of me.

"You have no right to speak like that, Mary," said Alice, indignantly.

"'Tis no word I have to say against you, darlin'. If ever an angel came down from heaven——"

"Mary!" My voice rang through that apartment like a bugle-call. I was astonished to hear it and I think that Alice was astonished too. Mary unquestionably was, for she looked alarmed. She straightened up to meet the onslaught.

Having asserted my manhood in that splendid fashion, I did n't know what to do. I perceived that my impulse to turn Mary out in the street was impracticable. In the first place, she would n't go, without being forced. And then the scandal, the neighbours, the appearance of the police!

"Well?" Mary responded in stentorian challenge, her arms at her waist.

"If you don't go straight back to your room I'll call a policeman," I said in a low voice.

Mary had expected so much more from me in the way of argument that she looked disappointed. She drew out the corners of her mouth in preparation for a retort. Then Alice rushed forward and placed both hands on her shoulders.

"Mary, dear, don't be cross, please, for my sake.

A Glimpse of Letty's Home Life 209

I know you are n't feeling well. So do let me take you into your room and help you into bed."

Touched by this expression of sympathy, Mary leaned against Alice and burst into tears. "Sure I'd do anything in the wide world fer you, darlin'. You poor, down-trodden child, if he ever dares to say a cross word to you again——"

"He won't, Mary. He won't. I promise you."

"He'd better not while I'm around," Mary sobbed.

"Ned, go out of the room," Alice whispered, and as I turned, she added: "Close the door, Ned."

I obeyed, feeling like a cur. At the door, I listened and I could hear Alice's words mingled with Mary's tears. Then the shuffling of feet told me that the two were gradually making their way to the kitchen. I sank into a chair and for ten minutes I waited. When Alice returned, carrying in her hand a long ugly black bottle, I felt as if I had aged several years. "She's asleep," she whispered.

I fixed my eyes on the bottle. "After getting around all that, her slumber ought to be profound."

"Let us open all the windows, dearest," Alice said pathetically. Then she looked down at her clothes. "Why, we have n't taken our coats off, have we?"

We kept on our wraps till we had the place thoroughly aired and then warm again. I sat where I could keep an eye on the kitchen door.

"I've locked her in, Ned. So you need n't worry," Alice said.

I took her hand and clasped it tightly. "I'm not thinking about that," I said.

"What, then?"

"About you, Alice." My voice shook.

"You silly thing, what is the matter with you?"

"Alice!"

"Well?"

"Have n't I always been good to you?"

"O Ned!" Alice petulantly exclaimed.

"Well, have n't I?"

"Of course."

"Do I make you unhappy sometimes?"

"Only when you're silly—like this."

I felt ashamed of my weakness; but I had to get comfort.

"What do you suppose put those ideas into her head?"

"Whose head?" Alice asked in a tone of complete mystification.

"Mary's," I replied humbly, as if speaking of the Queen of England.

For a few moments Alice looked bewildered. Then she burst out laughing and she laughed until I seized her by both arms and stopped her with a kiss.

"O Ned, I did n't know that you could be so absurd."

"Well," I insisted, "I'd like to know what put those ideas into her head."

"She wanted to have a fight with some one—that's all."

We sat up late planning to get rid of Mary and talking over the events of the day. We both felt as if several days had passed since we left the house with Letty Henderson in the morning. And we

A Glimpse of Letty's Home Life 211

agreed, as soon as we could, to sink back into our old routine of peace and systematic work.

"Now, dear Ned, to-morrow you must go to your desk right after breakfast and stay there till I come back from the studio."

"Oh!" I groaned. "The idea of that fellow painting your portrait. Why did n't I rebel when it was first spoken of?"

"But think, dear! What harm can it do? If Mr. Cosgrave makes a success of it he'll exhibit it at the American Artists and it will be talked about a lot. It will help to bring you more before the public."

"This talk about being before the public is beginning to be horrible to me. What dress are you going to wear?"

"Why, the one I wore at the Van Zandts'. It's the only one that's fit."

"That low-cut thing! Very well," I helplessly exclaimed. "Wear anything you like. Make yourself exactly like an actress. Be gazed at as if you were a spectacle. Get mixed up with people like Mrs. Eustace and be drawn into some scandal or tragedy. Of course, that's what those two people are preparing for. Don't consider me."

"You are the only one I am considering, Ned." Alice spoke with a calmness that alarmed me. In the silence that followed I thought I could hear the quick beating of her heart. Finally she said: "I will put Mrs. Eustace off. When she comes to-morrow I will tell her I am ill. Of course, what you say about the scandal and tragedy is absurd. You've

taken the whole matter far too seriously. Your fictional mind has simply run away with you."

I literally threw up my hands. "Go to-morrow by all means!" I exclaimed.

I hoped, I believed, that Alice would not go. In fact, I felt such assurance that I practically dismissed the matter from my mind. By this time it was nearly twelve o'clock, and I started to lock up for the night. As I approached the front door, I heard heavy steps in the hall. Then the bell rang, and a moment later a messenger was handing me a telegram. I opened it quickly and two pairs of eyes read these words:

"Be at my house to-morrow at ten sharp. We must talk about our great play.

"LILY VALENTINE."

While I looked for a fee for the messenger, Alice walked into the dining-room. I found her standing beside the table absorbed in thought. "What does it mean?" I asked, instinctively appealing to her intuition.

"It may mean several things," Alice replied. "But I think there is one real explanation."

I waited.

"Business to-night has probably been bad. So her fear that the piece is a failure has been confirmed."

"Then she'll have to put on another play."

Alice shook her head. "They'll keep her here for a couple of weeks and then they'll try it on the road. You've often told me how plays sometimes fail here and succeed out of New York."

A Glimpse of Letty's Home Life 213

"Yes and the reverse," I hastily assented. "Of course, that's the explanation," I went on. "She dreads the road. She can't bear to be separated from society," I satirically concluded.

"McKeesport must be rather tame after what she has here," said Alice, with a faint smile. "And if she should miss the Horse Show, I believe she'd fall ill. But remember," Alice spoke with new vigour, "you must n't even consider the possibility of collaborating with her. Tell her you are n't used to that sort of thing. *Our* great play!" Alice concluded, with a scornful glance at the telegram lying on the table.

Somehow the telegram swept every other consideration out of my mind. I went to bed perfectly content, realising that there were few things in life that could give such happiness as work. I resolved in future to avoid every distraction that would even remotely affect my daily task. Of course, the engagement in the morning was something quite different: that was business. It was worth sacrificing a morning for the sake of getting an order for a play. The fatigue of the long day of excitement quickly put me to sleep, and I dreamed that my play was finished and scheduled for a New York production. I woke to find with a pang that I still had the scenes and the dialogue to invent. Alice was standing beside my bed.

"It's nine o'clock."

"Oh!" I rubbed my face with both hands. "How's Mary?" I asked, my mind, as usual, losing no time in recalling the disagreeable incidents of the day before.

"She's very contrite and silent."

"Does she remember?"

"I think so. But she's willing that we should forget."

"Are n't you going to let her go?"

"I'll investigate the Employment Agencies first. And then, I'll let you give her notice."

CHAPTER XIV

MISS VALENTINE BECOMES BUSINESS-LIKE

THAT remark woke me up. I had just time enough for shaving, dressing, and for breakfast, before keeping my engagement. Miss Valentine was waiting for me in her drawing-room.

"I've been simply crazy to see you," she said. "I thought of driving down to your house last night. But that would have been scandalous, would n't it? But when I want to get a thing done in a hurry—Well, the fact is, our piece is a dead frost. The receipts dropped shockingly last night, and Holbrook was wild. He's talking of sending us all into the country—out West—with a lot of one-night stands. Now you must save me from such a fate. Why, I had expected to play in New York all winter."

"What can I do?"

"Get to work on that play of ours."

"Ah, Miss Valentine, I have such a lot of work on hand."

The actress looked at me reproachfully, as if I had given her a blow. "I did n't think that you were like that. I did n't think that you were—well, that you were *foxy*, like the others."

These words put me on the defensive. "If I work on that play," I said, "I shall have to stop work on the book I'm writing."

The actress pouted like a spoiled child. She was not used to being balked.

"There are plenty of men right here in New York who would jump at the chance of writing a play for me—or *with* me," she archly remarked.

"I should like to write a play for you," I said, in a neutral tone and careful of my emphasis.

Miss Valentine laughed aloud, swaying forward and back in her seat. At that moment I liked her immensely. She was an odd-enough mixture.

"I can't collaborate with any one. I'm not used to that sort of thing." I was determined to get in that remark so that I might repeat it to Alice.

"You want all the glory for yourself, don't you?" Miss Valentine lowered her face and kept her wonderful eyes fixed on me. "You are an exceedingly vexatious person," she said, smiling brilliantly, and I had a strong suspicion that she had heard some one say those words and that she was practising them on me. Already I had noted her fondness for calling people "persons." It gave her talk a knowing air quite out of harmony with her girlishness.

I said nothing in reply to her charge and I had the comfort of observing that she lost some of her aplomb. "After all," she said, her manner becoming perfectly frank, "all I want is a good play, with a good part in it, a *good* part, mind you. Will you undertake to write it?"

"How much time can you give me?" I was so pleased with the way I was keeping up my end in this interview, I began to believe I had business ability.

"A month!" she said decisively.

"A month!" I gasped.

"If you can do it at all, you can do it in a month."

"Why, it used to take Dumas at least a year. And Pinero, who is pursued by actors for plays—he does n't write more than one a year."

"Bah! That's all nonsense. Pinero takes his time and Dumas was probably lazy. Dramatists like to impress people by stories of that sort. What is a play? It does n't last more than two hours—except for the waits. Some of Walter Hart's plays would last much less time if there were no waits. They're the thinnest things. There's everything," the actress solemnly pronounced, "in making up your mind to do a thing and then doing it."

"If you can," I ventured to add in a low voice.

"Oh, you can. *You* can." The actress threw out her right arm and uttered the words as if she were playing in a Greek tragedy.

"What terms?" I almost whispered. If I were to keep going down the scale in my speech, she would soon be unable to hear me.

She quickly outlined a scheme of graduated royalties, from which I rapidly calculated that with good business it ought to bring me very nearly one hundred dollars a night. "Five hundred dollars in advance," she concluded, "and when I accept the play, five hundred dollars down on the day of acceptance."

I wonder if there is not something grasping and venal in all of us. Realising how keen the girl was to secure a play, I had a powerful temptation to get all I could out of her.

"You see, it would be very hard for me to work on speculation like that," I said, with an assumption of indifference. "I'd like to do the thing. I'd like to make the try." I noticed with surprise that I was nodding my head with great earnestness. "But I can't afford to give up a month's work without having the thing pretty definitely ordered and—and arranged," I concluded, becoming suddenly alarmed by my own boldness.

"Then I will give you the order! I'll get my attorney to send you a check and a contract to-day. You'll read the play to me as you go along."

Oh, blessed mistake that she made at that moment! She realised it as soon as I spoke.

"I could n't undertake to do that," I quickly replied. "I find I can't read my things while they are under way. It's very upsetting. Besides, I'm always going back and changing. Until the piece was finished, it would be likely to be fragmentary."

"But you will let me talk with you about it." The actress was on the verge of tears. Her tone became helplessly pleading.

"I'll be delighted to do that," I said, and I rose from my seat.

"And will you get to work right off—to-day?"

I could not keep from smiling. "Right off—to-day," I said, paying her back for trying to patronise me, and I started for the door. I could not have sat in that room five minutes longer. I wished to run, to shout. Above all things, I wished to rehearse to Alice every word of the interview, every tone.

"I'll have the contract sent this afternoon," Miss Valentine said at the door.

I walked rapidly home and I ran all the way upstairs. On reaching the apartment I looked through the rooms. In the distance Mary was busily occupied with preparation for luncheon.

"Where is Mrs. Foster, Mary?" I called out.

"She went away with a lady, sir," Mary replied with an eagerness in which I read remorse and a desire to please.

Then I remembered. Alice had gone to have that portrait painted after all!

My spirits sank. All my joy in the order for a play evaporated. I felt an almost uncontrollable desire to vent my anger on something or some one. But, from the distance, I could feel Mary's covert eye on me, and I recalled what she had said the night before. Then I was violently tempted to assail Mary. But I could not put her in the right like that, give her a chance in her senses to repeat the charges she had made in her cups. My anger presently gave way to a profound depression in which Lily Valentine's order loomed as a gigantic and hopeless task. I recalled what I had forgotten, that long before finishing the story of *Francesca Bayne* I had become utterly sick of the characters and indifferent to their doings. How could I go back to them again, live with them from day to day, make them live again, and, above all things, make them interesting? Then I walked hastily to my desk and closed the door so that Mary could not possibly see me. I searched among the book-shelves for a copy of *Francesca*: when I could

not find one I recalled that I had given all my copies away, and I reflected bitterly that if I did not stop giving autograph copies of my books I should become impoverished. I resolved never to give another. If my friends did not care enough for my books to buy them, then they could go without. And as for those people who asked for copies! The thought of them sent me weakly back to my desk. For a long time I sat there, leaning on my elbow and grieving over my fate. Then I began to think of the scenario and of all the pleasant things that Letty Henderson and Lily Valentine had said about it. I felt myself gradually coming out of my torpor. After all, it might not be so hard to write a play. For one thing, there would be no description of people, or clothes, or scenery. Except for the instructions with regard to the sets and the stage-business, it would be all dialogue. In my mind I followed the sequence of scenes for the first act. My eyes mechanically searched for a pencil. Then I seized the sheet of paper and began to write. With joy I found myself going rapidly on.

"Well?"

I looked up, my face hot, my whole body tingling. Alice was looking down at me.

"I've been standing here at least five minutes," she said.

I glanced at the door and seeing that it was closed, I drew Alice down and rapturously kissed her. I was in one of the rare moods of life, the mood of exaltation, where all the faculties are marvellously alive and the greatest of ambitions seem easy to

attain. I felt as if my triumph were already won, and I wished Alice to have her share in it at once.

She drew away from me, laughing, and looked with satisfaction at the pile of sheets on the desk. "I was afraid you were going to scold me," she said.

Then, with a pang, I recalled what she had been doing; but somehow it did not seem so bad now.

"What happened?" I asked, trying to look more severe than I really felt.

"Mrs. Eustace came at eleven. Then——"

"Up here?"

Alice nodded.

"And she looked over the apartment and said it was 'sweet,' and 'cosey,' and 'cunning,' of course."

"You're just about as near as you usually get, dear Ned."

"Well, what did she do?"

"She said it must be a great relief to live in an apartment. She thinks of renting her house and taking an apartment herself. You see," Alice concluded with a sigh, "she's rich enough to be able to talk poor." Alice hesitated and I knew she had something to tell. "It was really very pleasant," she went on, briskly. "It's a beautiful studio, a great big place way down in the slums and all painters in the building. Cosgrave has the most wonderful things, tapestries, and brass, and old carvings.

"Oh, yes, I know those places," I replied, somewhat irritably. "All cluttered and dusty. To go into them gives me a headache."

"It was in perfect order, the whole place," Alice continued, with the air of not hearing me. "He's

as fussy as an old maid." Her eyes wandered off into the distance.

"Well?"

"Something strange happened."

I controlled an impulse to smile.

"Of course, it may not be anything." Alice drew up a chair and faced me. Her manner had become very important. "When we got to the studio the first thing Mrs. Eustace said was, after we took our wraps off: 'Oh, I left my necklace here the other day.'"

"What?" I gasped, incredulously.

Alice rebuked me with a frown. "He's been doing a portrait of her, too, a full-length. It's nearly finished. It brings out the very worst that's in her. It quite scared me. But never mind about that. He said, in the most *déagé* manner: 'I don't think you could have left it here. I should have seen it, or the woman would have found it. It must be in your jewel-case at home.' Then Mrs. Eustace turned awfully red and then pale. But the wonderful thing was that she did n't say anything."

"M'm!" I murmured, to gain time to think. Then I asked: "What did he mean by 'the woman'?"

"The woman who has charge of the place, of course," said Alice, quickly, brushing aside my interruption. "After that Mrs. Eustace became *dreadfully* pleasant. That's the only way I can describe it."

"It may have been some cheap thing that she wore for the picture. It is n't at all likely that she'd wear a valuable necklace to a studio."

Alice gave me a look that plainly said: "I forgive you for spoiling my story and for being so stupid." She waited for a long time. Then she resumed: "I looked carefully at the portrait. The necklace was made of diamonds. It must be worth a fortune."

I rose from my seat. "I think you'd better not go on with that portrait," I remarked with as much marital dignity as I could command.

"But what can I do now?"

"The easiest thing would be to become suddenly ill," I replied.

"That is impossible," said Alice, in a voice indicating that something more than honour was in her mind. She raised her eyes appealingly and apprehensively. "At the studio, Mrs. Eustace asked me to go to the Horse Show with her on Monday night. Then I said we were half committed to Teddy. And then she said she'd arrange it with Teddy and we'd all go together." By this time Alice's cheeks were flaming.

"So we're in for it," I grimly remarked.

"You know what a manager she is."

During luncheon a clerk called from Miss Valentine's attorneys, bearing the promised check and contract in duplicate. When I had signed both contracts and given one of them to the clerk, and Alice and I were alone again, we sat and looked at each other.

"Is n't it wonderful?" Alice whispered.

I was too moved to speak.

"Lily Valentine did n't lose much time, did she?" Alice went on, smiling. "Oh, how splendid to be able to put things through like that! No wonder

women want to be actresses, or anything in the world, rather than stay at home and be nothing."

"Here, here!" I said, in absent reproof. I was thinking of what I had done. I should *have* to write that play now, and in a month too! I began to have a feeling of panic.

"We can get so many things that we need—clothes and——"

"Wait a minute, Alice," I said, and my voice sounded hoarse. "There is one thing that we must do during the next month. Everything else must be subordinated to that. We must get that play written."

Alice looked alarmed. "Why, of course, dear, of course," she replied, in a tone that people employ with the dangerous or the insane.

"No more society! No Horse Show! Nothing!"

We finished the meal in silence. I went straight to my desk and I worked till five o'clock. Then, without saying a word to Alice, I went out. It was selfish; it was brutal; but I was in the mood in which I could not trust myself to speak. When I returned, Alice was waiting for me in one of her prettiest gowns, and apparently in her most cheerful mood. We spent a quiet evening, looking over the papers and reading aloud a short story. If any one had called I should have been tempted to commit murder. The next morning I worked desperately, but I did not dare to read over what I had written. After luncheon I told Alice that I was going out for a long walk and, without comment, she assented. I strode up to Fifth Avenue and an impulse led me to

go into the Waldorf-Astoria. In the marble corridor I came face to face with a youth in a long black coat, who seized me by the arm.

"You're the very man I want to see."

To my surprise, it was Teddy Markoe; I had been too absorbed in thinking of that infernal play to recognise him.

"Oh, hello!" I said, roughly, I fear. Somehow I associated him with my anguish over the play. To meet him seemed like recalling some unpleasant event from the past.

"Say—I met Mrs. Eustace at the Hendersons' last night and she said that she and your wife would take care of that box-party for the first night of the Horse Show. Miss Henderson is going," he went on eagerly, "and I've asked them all to dine with me. Mrs. Eustace said she'd arrange all the details with Mrs. Foster and Letty. So I sha'n't bother my head about it."

"Oh, all right. All right," I said, nodding my head in the ridiculous fashion that I have when I'm embarrassed.

"Come and have a drink!" Teddy exclaimed, apparently as an afterthought. But I shook my head. I could not possibly have listened in patience to further confidences.

"And oh, by the way, Mrs. Eustace and I have talked over your coming down to my place—after the Horse Show. I think Letty and her mother will come too."

"Oh, that's awfully jolly," I replied, becoming affected in my desire to hide from him how I felt.

I was so successful that he seized me by the arm and reiterated his invitation to drink.

"I'd like to first rate," I said with a powerful earnestness, "but I have an appointment and I'm late already."

I walked away from him and hurried to the desk, keeping an eye on Teddy as he sped away toward the Thirty-fourth Street exit. I passed the desk with rapid steps and I bolted for home. After all, that seemed the most secure place in my anguish over the play. I could have no peace of mind until I impressed on Alice that, till the play was finished, the slightest reference to social festivities would be likely to throw me into a fit! But as I approached the house the selfishness of this course dawned on me. I resolved to let Alice go to the Horse Show alone. Why should I let my work interfere with her pleasure? From the generous thought I derived so much solace that, on reaching home, I felt almost serene.

When I told Alice of my talk with Teddy and of my resolve to let her have the evening at the Horse Show without me, I had one of the great surprises of my life. She listened calmly. Then she said:

"Of course, my going without you is altogether out of the question."

"Why?"

"It would look so bad."

"What do I care about looks?"

"You care a good deal—with other people. It's supposed to be our party—in a sort of way," Alice went on, "though it seems to have been taken out of our hands quite effectively. But the fact remains

that to go without you would be scandalous. It will only be one evening, anyway; if you keep at the play as feverishly as you've begun it, you'll be a wreck within a few days. You need distraction now more than you ever did."

I felt too disappointed to argue. "I will go on one condition, Alice—that you avoid all mention of the evening till it comes."

Alice shrugged her shoulders, and the subject dropped. Till Monday I worked on the first act, finishing it at exactly twenty minutes of three in the afternoon. When I threw down my pen, I felt like an escaped prisoner.

"Alice," I exclaimed, pushing into the dining-room, "I'm going to take the rest of the afternoon off, and I'm crazy to go out with you to-night."

"I knew you would be, Ned," she amiably replied.

CHAPTER XV

WE ATTEND THE HORSE SHOW

MY preparations for the evening kept me so busy that, before dinner, I had just time enough to glance at the evening paper. This head-line at once caught my eye: "Slump in Wall Street!" Other lines in big type conveyed that Archibald Drew, the stock-broker, who held talks with the public by means of the advertising columns of the daily press, had published another of his sensational articles.

"He ought to have been an actor, that man."

I looked up, startled. Alice had stolen into the room. "Would n't it be interesting," I said, "to trace out the effect of an article like that? To show, on one side, the people who made money and what they did with the money, and, on the other side, the people who lost money——"

"And how they got on without it," Alice remarked.

"It would make a great human document."

"I hope dear Mr. Henderson has n't suffered," said Alice, with an absent smile. Then the smile faded from her face. "Poor Letty!"

"It seems to me she's getting in deeper and deeper," I said warningly.

Alice had informed me that we were to be "fetched" to the Horse Show in a "vehicle," but she refused to give any details. "You've been like one in a trance

during the past week," she said, "and you don't deserve to know what has been going on in the world." I had a curious feeling that I had come back from a long sleep, and it was refreshing to realise that the world continued to run its natural course. The truth was that I was ridiculously happy because I had finished that act. I kept assuring myself that plenty of men, even plenty of men that I myself knew, had written, not one play, but several plays, and their achievement, far from inspiring them with joy, had a rather saddening effect; but the thought could not damp my spirits. If one had never written a play, one could n't feel grieved at never having had a play produced.

While Alice was dressing, I returned to the newspaper and I read the account of the "slump" in stocks. It had been almost unprecedented and the losses had been alarming. The article set my mind speculating. What a chance for a novel or a play! It ought to abound in dramatic situations and to give fine chances for characterisation, developed wholly by action. As soon as Alice entered the room I started to tell her of my inspiration.

"Have you lost your eyesight?"

Then I saw that Alice was wearing a marvellously simple and well-fitting and beautiful white frock.

For a long time I looked at her. Then I said:

"Is it all gone?"

On Alice's face appeared an expression of alarm. "What?" she gasped, bewildered, as if I had lost my mind.

"The five hundred."

"Oh!" She turned so that I might survey the hang of the skirt. "Is n't it a triumph?" she said. Then she went on, as if referring to a most trifling matter:

"Letty took me to her mother's man. He's wonderful and awfully cheap."

I could n't help laughing.

"Now be nice, Ned."

So I held out my arms and I was as nice as I knew how to be.

Alice kept turning to the window and trying to look down into the street. At eight o'clock her sharp ears detected a rumbling from the depths below. "Let's go," she said nervously, and before we reached the hall, our bell rang. I followed her down the stairs.

"We're to ride in one of those omnibus things," Alice whispered breathlessly. "It's Teddy's idea. He thought it might be convenient for all of us, and Letty was nearly frightened to death for fear she might have to ride alone with him in a *coupé*."

It occurred to me that Alice might have mentioned this detail before; but I have observed that, occasionally, women consider detail antipathetic to men.

I confess that I did not know quite what Alice meant by "those omnibus things," and I was astonished to see a great shining coach standing at the door. I had seen that kind of vehicle before, but somehow, I had always associated it with hotels. As the door was opened before us, we were greeted with cries from Letty Henderson and from Mrs. Eustace and

from Letty's mother, which Alice caught up and responded to with gay laughter. Monty, who sat near the door, contributed to the chorus with his effeminate little cackle.

In the exchange of questions between the ladies that followed our entrance, I heard Alice say to Mrs. Henderson: "But is n't Mr. Henderson coming?"

"Later, my dear," Mrs. Henderson replied, and over the rattle of the omnibus on the rough pavement, her sweet voice piped: "He's been having a dreadful time in Wall Street to-day, poor man."

I don't know whether the panes of glass had been loosely fitted to that vehicle or whether my ears were peculiarly alert; but we rattled fiercely all the way to the Madison Avenue asphalt. And then, in a moment or two, we were in the blaze of the lights from the Madison Square Garden. The Avenue and the side streets skirting the Garden were packed with carriages and with people. For a long time we stood motionless in the crush; then, at intervals, we would move slowly forward.

"Well, New York has one good thing anyway," Cosgrave grudgingly remarked, looking out on the portico of the Garden. "It's a wonder the New Yorkers have sense enough to appreciate this place. I thought they would tear it down and put up an office building here long ago."

"It must be a frightful expense," Mrs. Eustace cried, rather unhappily, from her point of view, I thought. "I don't see how it can possibly pay."

Cosgrave smiled wearily and lapsed from the discussion.

"It's only good for enormous shows like this and for big political meetings," Mrs. Eustace went on with some spirit.

"Don't forget the French Ball," said Monty. "Say," he exclaimed, leaning toward me, "have you ever been to the French Ball? It's great. You ought to write it up."

"You silly boy, he does n't write for the *Police Gazette*," said Mrs. Eustace.

"Well, it's the place to see life," Monty insisted, and we all rebuked him with silence.

It must have been later than half-past eight when we succeeded in reaching the entrance to the Garden and making a landing. We were at once caught in the crowd and borne into the broad entrance and up the incline. I had a confused vision of dazzling opera-cloaks and bobbing crush hats. In spite of the discomfort, no one seemed ill-humoured. "At all costs we must keep together," cried the masterful Mrs. Eustace, and we manœuvred to maintain the integrity of our group. Even when we reached the vast Garden we enjoyed only a mild relief, for the circuitous walk was made difficult of passage by the multitude. But oh! what a sight it was! Everyone well dressed, everyone radiant, beautiful women on all sides, and the band playing a Strauss waltz!

When we reached Teddy's box, Mrs. Eustace voiced our sensations: "I feel as if I had n't a rag left on my back!"

When the ladies had removed their wraps, I understood why Alice had determined to have a new

gown. Even to my masculine eye it was plain that newness was stamped on every gown in the box. Mrs. Henderson wore a wonderful creation that might have been designed for a girl making her first appearance in society; beside it, her daughter's charming frock of pale blue seemed almost matronly. Mrs. Eustace shimmered in one of those indescribable black gowns with jet or something all over them that give even to the matronly wearer a kind of snake-like slimness.

"Oh, my dear, why did n't you wear your diamonds!" exclaimed Mrs. Henderson, in generous reproach. "That frock would have set them off marvellously."

"I'm tired of those diamonds," Mrs. Eustace petulantly replied. "They're overworked. I've been wearing them at the opera for nearly ten seasons."

Again I had a creepy feeling and I knew that Alice was gazing into the ring in order to avoid my eye. Cosgrave, standing at the back of the box, was pulling at his moustache and looking large and handsome and important.

Already the performance had begun and a beautiful chestnut cob was prancing in the ring. Not one of our party, with the exception of Teddy, however, displayed the slightest interest in the ring: they were absorbed in watching the other spectators.

"Would n't it be nice," Mrs. Henderson whispered to me, with a smile of humorous appreciation for which I should hardly have given her credit, "if we could have the Horse Show without any horses?"

"That's the way I feel about the Opera," Mrs.

Eustace returned. "I often think that Wagner was sent into the world to punish us for our vanity."

"But after a little practice it becomes easy to distract one's mind," said Mrs. Henderson, pressing her pearl-handled lorgnette against her eyes.

"I find it a great help, knowing the singers." Mrs. Eustace was still studying the box-people. "Since Madame Nordica and I became friends, I've actually been interested in *Tristan and Isolde*—parts of it. She has made me realise what hard work it is. There's Dick Ferris," she continued, in the same level voice, "advertising himself, as usual."

"In Mrs. Goddard's box!" cried Mrs. Henderson, in an awe-stricken whisper. "How in the world did he ——?"

"Oh, he amuses her. She thinks his brogue is so quaint."

"How pretty Mrs. Silsbee looks!" Letty Henderson exclaimed.

"Where?" said Mrs. Henderson and Mrs. Eustace at the same moment.

"To the left of the Goddards—three boxes away."

"Oh, with the tiara," said her mother, with relief in her voice. "How she does keep her looks!" she added enviously.

"They say she starves herself to death."—Mrs. Eustace was still searching. "Whenever she goes out to dinner she carries a loaf of *gluten* bread with her. Oh, well, she's welcome to all that brute, Silsbee, gives her. But I don't care for the tiara-boom-de-ay style of beauty myself. Heavens!" Mrs. Eustace lowered her lorgnette, inspected it as if doubt-

ing its veracity, and pressed it against her eyes again. "It *is*! Well, upon my word! What brass!"

She leaned forward to whisper in Mrs. Henderson's ear. Then she added in an audible voice: "It's been going on since last summer."

Mrs. Henderson agitatedly resorted to her lorgnette again, following the direction of Mrs. Eustace's gaze. "She looks perfectly brazen, does n't she?"

"They say he's determined to marry her," Mrs. Eustace explained in a voice of injury. "Think of it! She went to his mother and asked her what his prospects were."

"Confinement in jail if he keeps on," Mrs. Henderson ruthlessly prophesied.

"For once the old lady showed a little grit. 'His prospects, so far as I am concerned,' she said, 'are the door,' and she waved her hand and told the butler to show her out. Fortunately the butler was about six feet tall and my lady marched into the street as meek as Moses."

Mrs. Henderson pursed her lips. "She'll never marry him," she said, shaking her head with decision.

Alice and Letty Henderson were trying, I observed, to pay some attention to the horses.

Meanwhile, I had heard enough of the talk to try to divert my mind from it. A thin little man was exciting mirth by his appearance on a magnificent black hunter and winning admiration for his riding. It was thrilling to see the hunter step with rhythmic majesty over the sawdust ring. Teddy's eyes were shining with pleasure.

"Well, Billy Wainwright can give the rest of us

cards and spades," he said. "He breeds his horses at his stock-farm in Kentucky, and I believe there is n't a good horse in the State that he does n't know. Anyway, he always gets the first pick."

"Why are n't you in the ring?" Letty asked.

"Oh, I've got tired of making a spectacle of myself," he replied with a laugh. "I'm willing to let the horses have the glory."

Mrs. Eustace and Mrs. Henderson, who had been talking across the box, drew their seats together, Cosgrave took a place behind Mrs. Eustace's chair, and Monty drifted away to talk with some friends in a neighbouring box. So Alice and Letty and I were able to listen to Teddy. Under the inspiration of the display of horse-flesh, Teddy became like another man. His face, dull in repose and often surly, grew radiant with enthusiasm. In every contest he knew which horse would be the winner and, more marvellous still, seemed to know the history, not only of the owner, but of the horse as well. It grew to be a joke to see the horse that he praised summoned to the judge's stand and go prancing around the ring decorated with the blue ribbon. And yet, there was nothing authoritative or conceited in what he said or in his manner; he simply spoke out of a mind full of knowledge of horses. I admired and envied him, and I was amused to note a look in Letty's face that suggested a tender pride in him. I could not decide whether his perceptions, so sharp in some directions, so blunt in others, gave him encouragement; but he certainly appeared to greater advantage than he had ever done in my presence.

During the first interval, when the horses ceased to distract the people from one another, and the spirit of curiosity led even the be-diamonded box-occupants to desert their perches and to join in the grand parade, Teddy's light was dimmed and he fell into silence and surliness again. But the two older women took on new vivacity.

"Shall we go down?" said Mrs. Eustace.

Mrs. Henderson shivered. "Into that awful crowd? Suppose we let people come to us. Besides, my husband may turn up at any moment."

Mrs. Eustace looked amused. "Husbands can usually take care of themselves, I've noticed—especially in a place like this. Oh, hello!"—Mrs. Eustace leaned back and gave her hand to some one who had just entered the box. I looked around and saw a little red-faced man, with white hair and sparkling blue eyes.

"I've been trying to get a bow from you all the evening," he said, with an insinuating manner and a faint brogue.

He leaned forward and pressed Mrs. Eustace's hand. "And how do you do, Mrs. Henderson?" he went on with affectionate earnestness. "And Letty, my dear. Don't get up, dearie, and *hello*, Monty. Teddy, why did n't you show Blue Bell? I was that disappointed I almost cried. Sure, there was n't a hunter in the ring to-night that could compare with Blue Bell!"

I actually thought that he was going to kiss Letty, and was surprised by the evident joy that his appearance gave her. He turned to Alice, with a smile that

seemed to say, "I don't remember you exactly; but I like you."

Mrs. Eustace spoke the words of introduction, and at the mention of his name I grew more interested. So this was the celebrated Dick Ferris. "Now is n't that strange?" he said with his pleasant musical cadence and speaking like a kindly old priest. "I knew I'd seen you somewhere before, Mrs. Foster! Now was it at the Goddards'? Well, if it was n't at the Goddards', 't was at the Macys'? Well, now is n't that strange?"

He sat in the middle of the box and babbled on, ignoring Cosgrave. At first, I assumed that he had not noticed the painter; then I began to suspect that the slight was deliberate. "Well, now, a night like this makes me feel ten years younger. If I can only pull off a blue ribbon for one of my Mexican ponies this week, I'll be the happiest man in New York."

On Teddy's glum face there appeared a glimmer of light. "So you're going to get up against Billy Raynor, are you?"

"Oh, I suppose he'll take everything in sight!" Ferris lamented. "Is n't it awful, the way those fellers come over from Boston and put us to shame? There ain't any good horses in New York any more. Archie Drew will get the blue ribbon for the tandem, of course. By the way," he went on, his brogue gaining in richness as he grew more confidential, "if you could have heard old Goddard talk about Archie Drew to-night! You know Archie has been making war on his stocks, an' to-day he came out with a

fierce one an' they say the old man dropped nearly a million. But he's here to-night all the same an' he says he'll get back at Drew if it breaks him. There he is now. Will you look? Right over there, near the Judge's stand, with the crowd around him."

"Who?" Mrs. Eustace cried, following his look.

"Archie Drew himself. My, but he's the brave man to come here among these millionaires! If they were n't such a disorganised lot, I believe they'd lynch him. There's not one among 'm that has n't lost through him to-day."

I looked, too, for I cared more about getting a glimpse of Archibald Drew than the President of the United States. I expected to see a brutal-looking man with a thick-set figure, a powerful jaw, and piercing eyes; but instead I saw a man of medium height, slightly built, with delicate features, light brown hair and moustache, and with a humorous expression playing over his face. He seemed the personification of mildness.

"What do you think of him, Dick?" said Mrs. Eustace.

"Think of him!" Ferris exclaimed. "Sure, I think he's a wonderful man. But don't tell the Goddards I said so. They talk about him as if he was the Fiend Incarnate."

"He's a good sport," said Teddy approvingly. "I don't know how he makes his money; but he knows how to spend it."

"That's everything, my boy," said Ferris, giving Teddy a little push.

"Yes, it does n't make any difference how you get it," said Mrs. Henderson, rather bitterly.

"An' now, my dears, I must go," said Ferris, rising quickly. "I'll see you again," he added, and away he darted, including us all, even Cosgrave, in the benediction of his smile.

"From flower to flower," said Mrs. Eustace. "Dick does n't purpose to let any one forget him."

"To think that he came to this country a poor Irish immigrant, hardly able to read!" Mrs. Eustace confided to me. "He's made millions in some sort of business—I don't know just what it is—something ill-smelling."

"And he's ridden into society," Mrs. Henderson added, "behind a pack of hounds."

"Oh, that's what the papers are always saying!" Mrs. Eustace exclaimed. "I'm glad he is in society because he's so different from other people, and that's a blessed relief."

"I thought he bought his way in by establishing a free lunch at the Waldorf-Astoria," said Cosgrave loftily.

Mrs. Eustace laughed. "Well, he is always hanging around the place, that's true, and it's a great convenience when you're alone to meet him there. He has a positive genius for thinking up the most gorgeous luncheons on the spur of the moment. The only trouble is, you never can be sure what you'll encounter at his table. He has a way of bringing a lot of people together from all quarters of the hotel. Still," Mrs. Eustace concluded philosophically, "as I grow old, I grow more liberal. I used to think that

society ought to be exclusive. Now I want it to include everybody that's amusing. All I ask is—keep the bores out. Of course, Dick Ferris is an awful climber and you can't snub him—you positively can't. But there's something lovable about the dear old thing."

"His money," said Cosgrave in a low voice of assent.

"No, his blarney," said Mrs. Henderson, with a little titter.

Most of the promenaders had gone back to their seats, and the horses had a chance again. The next event was the tandem-driving, and the celebrated Archibald Drew created a sensation by appearing in the ring with his horses. Whatever may have been the sentiments of the millionaires at the sight he presented, that part of the attendance which did not consist of millionaires received him with rapturous applause. He looked exceedingly handsome as he sat on his high seat and deftly guided his horses around the ring, and in his bearing I fancied that I could get suggestions of his mastery. When he rode up to receive the blue ribbon, his face wore a smile of benevolent amusement. It was plainly the smile of one used to success.

At the very moment when Drew was receiving the blue ribbon, Henderson entered the box. His face was as white as the waistcoat that he wore. He merely nodded to us and he fixed his eyes on the financier-sportsman. And then, as Drew drove triumphantly around the ring, laughing with good humour in response to the applause, I heard Hender-

son, who was standing beside me, mutter words so awful that the memory of them still burns in my mind.

"What a chance to shoot him!" he remarked aloud, between his teeth. "I'd like to have a try at him myself."

"Why, you look as if you'd come straight out of a sick-bed!" exclaimed Mrs. Eustace.

Henderson drew a long breath. "It's been a hard day for me," he said, and I felt a rush of sympathy toward him. In his agitation, the affected, insincere hero had disappeared, leaving the man,—not much of a man, perhaps, but real.

His wife gave him a quick, keen look. Long used to his faking, she was plainly disturbed by his sincerity.

"Do you think you ought to stay, dear?" she said, and there was a touch of tenderness in her voice.

"Oh, I'm all right." He immediately braced up and became grand again. It was curious to see him in process of inflation. A little colour appeared in his face; he made comments on the horses designed to show his knowledge of horse flesh and plainly causing Teddy some irritation. Twice Teddy started to correct him and then checked himself.

CHAPTER XVI

TEDDY PLAYS THE HOST

AS the evening waned, the boxes began to thin out. It was plain that society was gluttoned with displaying itself, and had already begun to tire of the poor horses. The promenaders, however, seemed to retain their numbers; among them I began to recognise the smooth, lined, and alert faces of actors then playing in New York. Already they had finished their nightly duties. Presently, I saw some one in the crowd waving a white-gloved hand toward our box, and I recognised Lily Valentine. Beside her walked that joker, her manager, the irrepressible Holbrook. Lily Valentine, I perceived, was causing a sensation, both in the promenade and among the people in the boxes. It was strange, I reflected, the way she had impressed the imagination of the theatre-going public. Even here, in this galaxy of celebrities, she stood out. She was almost as great a sensation as Archibald Drew. And yet, she was not really beautiful, as I could easily perceive from my point of vantage, and she was carelessly dressed.

As I turned away, Mrs. Eustace exclaimed, "There! did n't I tell you?" and, on looking again, I saw Dick Ferris fondling Lily's hand and leaning toward her with tender solicitude. "Now he'll go parading

around with her and get the best advertisement he's had to-night."

Letty Henderson had begun to show signs of fatigue and nervousness. On an inspiration I asked her if she would n't join in the parade for a little while with Alice and me. She accepted with an eagerness that made me suspect she had been longing to escape. I feared that Teddy would offer to accompany us, and I was relieved when he said: "Back soon?"

"In five minutes," I cheerfully replied, and down the rough board steps we went.

"Oh!" Letty said in a long sigh of relief, "I hope you don't mind going about in this awful throng. If I could only—only get a little air."

We assured her that we did n't mind and that fresh air was easily obtained even in New York. We made our way out to Madison Avenue and we stood on the sidewalk.

"I know I'm silly," Letty said, "but I felt that if I stayed in that place just a few minutes longer something dreadful would surely happen to me."

"You were a little faint, dear," said Alice.

"Perhaps so." The girl appealed to me. "Do you ever have those presentiments? Do you ever feel that a certain day or a certain time may be—oh, it may be terribly important for you? It may be what they call a turning-point or something like that—only worse, worse than a turning-point. That usually means relief, does n't it, change for the better?" She clasped her hands and looked at us feverishly.

"I've had those experiences," Alice promptly interposed, "and they've always come when I've not been feeling well, and they never, never turn out to be true," she concluded, laughing.

"I've been trying so hard lately not to let myself feel like that, and—and I thought I was growing ever so much more sensible. But I don't know. You see, father's coming home in such a state. I have never seen him as he was to-night. He usually tries to be cheerful. But he said—he said he had lost everything."

"Lost everything?" Alice repeated with dismay. If I was less dismayed, it was because I supposed that Henderson did not have much to lose.

"On account of what happened to-day in Wall Street. It has all made me quite wretched. And then, seeing that man, that Mr. Drew,—I don't know that he was wrong to do what he did. Perhaps he had to. It's so hard to understand. I only know what it means to us, and especially what it means to me."

"I think we'd better go back now, dear," said Alice. "You ought to be at home."

"But I'm ever so much better," said the girl, trying to smile, "and I'd rather not have you say to mamma that I'm not well. Only, please stay near me, won't you?"

Alice promised and when we went back, Mrs. Eustace, by chance, made one of her good-humoured remarks that put us at our ease. A few moments later Lily Valentine appeared, followed by Holbrook and Dick Ferris.

"You did n't invite me to come to your box," she said reproachfully to Teddy, "but here I am just the same."

"The Queen is welcome anywhere," said Cosgrave with mock solemnity.

"Now I have a scheme," said Teddy, raising his voice over the chattering of the women. "You are all to come to the Show on Saturday night and then, afterward, you are to come down to my place at Belfont."

"Little me, too?" said Lily Valentine.

"Everybody!" cried Teddy.

"But how in the world are we going to get there at that time of night?" the actress insisted.

"Special train. Send your luggage ahead or bring it along with you, as you please."

"Oh, these millionaires!" Miss Valentine glanced at Holbrook. "They're even more wonderful than theatrical managers. Why don't you have special trains for me, Mr. Manager?"

Holbrook laughed as if she had made a marvellous joke. "You don't want me, do you?" he said to Teddy.

"Well, I guess I do," Teddy insisted, and from his manner I saw that the two were friends.

I was tempted to assert my courage and to declare on the spot that I could not go to the place; but I dared not make myself conspicuous. Besides, I caught an appealing look sent from Letty Henderson's eyes to Alice. But, good heavens! how could we stand between that girl and her fate? It was as plain as daylight that a perfect understanding already existed between Mrs. Henderson and Teddy.

"Well, now, my dears," Dick Ferris spoke up in his soft brogue, which I was beginning to find quite lovable, "suppose we all go and have a little bite at the Waldorf-Astoria."

"I've arranged for all that," said Teddy, with his rough directness. "You come along with us, if you like."

"No Waldorf-Astoria for me," Lily Valentine exclaimed decisively, and she prepared to leave the box. Though the show had not finished, a thin stream of people was pouring out of the vast amphitheatre. "Mr. Manager, you must take me home."

I dreaded the ordeal of that supper; but once in the cold air and in the omnibus, I discovered that I had an appetite. Monty, who had kept flitting in and out of the box, devoted himself to Alice, and I had a chance to talk with Letty Henderson.

"Has n't it really been a nice evening?" she said, as if to make up for her temporary weakness. "Do you know," she went on, with a sudden change of tone, "I believe there is just one way of having a good time and that is by making yourself have it."

Those words inspired me with a kind of hectic determination, and during the supper that Teddy had ordered for us at the hotel, I believe I talked more than any one else—except Dick Ferris, who talked all the time. That whiff of cold air had given me a second wind. Other people from the Horse Show nearly filled the place. Somehow the overdressing of the women and the atmosphere of wanton luxury did not distress me. The interest of the evening rather thrilled my literary sense. I felt somehow that I

was living in the material of good fiction. I had a sense of friendly gratitude toward the people who had made the spectacle so entertaining to me—especially toward Archibald Drew, whose manipulations in one day had created so many splendid stories, in which joy and sorrow made beautifully contrasting effects.

But the next day I paid dear for my recreation. I found that I had lost my grip on the play. I could not write; I could not even think. My mind absolutely refused to notice such a thing as a second act. I complained to Alice and she said, laconically, "Take a rest." On the second day, my mind grew somewhat more limber; but I could not write a line of satisfactory dialogue. I began to fear that I should never be able to write again. I saw poverty confronting me as a result of my social dissipations. And then, on the third day, I grew so desperate that I forced myself to work, and for several hours I wrote furiously. By Friday night I had completed the act.

"Take the sheets," I said to Alice, with superstitious fear. "Don't let me see them till they're all copied. I feel as if I had been run through a wringer."

"The trip down to Teddy's place will do you good," said Alice.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, remembering.

"You know you're crazy to go. Think of seeing that fine old country house with the big open-grate fires. And then the stock farm, the horses——"

"Here, here!" I cried. "Bridle that imagination." Then I reflected for a few moments. "It's ridiculous—our going there in the middle of the night."

"That's what I like about it—the adventure."

"Yes, and the loss of sleep."

"We'll make it up the next morning."

"How about the luggage?"

"I've arranged all that. Letty's going to send down here for our trunk."

"Trunk!" I gasped. "How long are we to be there?"

"Over the week-end."

"How many rigs are you taking?"

"Three gowns."

"Besides the one you'll wear at the Horse Show?"

Alice nodded.

"Of course, it's no use to complain," I said, turning away.

"Especially when there's nothing to complain about," Alice added, laughing.

The next day, though I had intended to loaf, I was seized with a powerful desire to revise those two acts, and I worked on them all day long. By five o'clock I was so tired that to go to that Horse Show again seemed like a labour of Hercules.

"We'll go late, Ned," said Alice to comfort me. "I wrote to Letty not to let any one call for us, and she sent me word to-day that we'd find our tickets at the box-office. I believe Teddy is dining at Letty's to-night. After dinner you can lie down for a while."

"So the affair marches?"

"What affair?"

"Those two. I know we are all asked down there so that he can get a chance to propose to her."

Alice did not reply and I grudgingly made preparations for the evening. Without saying a word to me, Alice had sent my things with hers to Teddy's place, and I could not help reflecting that she was the greatest comfort a man could have, and that the least I could do in return was to make her life as bright as possible. After all, it was hard for a woman to be married to a literary man. At times it seemed hard to me for a woman to be married to any man.

We walked to the Madison Square Garden and arrived so late that we had no difficulty in making our way up the entrance. I was astonished to find apparently the same vast crowd of people there that I had seen nearly a week before.

We found Teddy's box filled with guests that had made up our previous party, excepting Monty, whom we discovered in the distance with the Goddards. It took me a long time to get into the spirit of the Show again. Somehow it seemed stale and I longed for it to end. Blue ribbon after blue ribbon was won without giving me a thrill. I wondered if I were growing old.

It had been arranged that we were to go to the Long Island Ferry at Thirty-fourth Street in automobiles. Lily Valentine arrived late, with Holbrook, saying that she had been detained at the theatre, and we had what seemed at one time to be a hopeless confusion in getting all the people together and in dividing them into groups for transportation. Finally, we reached the ferry and we stood out on the deck in the clear, cold night, bright with a moon and with millions of stars. The company had provided

Teddy with a beautiful new car and, as soon as we started, waiters appeared with champagne and sandwiches. We were warned not to eat much, as a hot supper was waiting for us; but we paid no heed, for the sandwiches of caviar were exceedingly appetising. Every one appeared to be in high good humour, even Cosgrave, who unbent from his dignity, and indulged in somewhat extravagant horseplay. The train went like fury, and it seemed hardly more than a few minutes after we started when we arrived at Kinglake, from which point we were to ride in automobiles to Teddy's place in Belfont.

As we walked across the platform of the little station to the machines puffing in the road, Miss Valentine whispered to me: "Automobiles to burn! Don't you wish that you were a stock-broker or the son of a stock-broker, instead of a writer?"

We lost little time in jumping into the vehicles, and we fairly tore over the road. In about five minutes we were entering what looked like a magnificent park, and we wound along a road lined with stately trees, with the moonlight shimmering through the bare branches. Then there suddenly came into view a large Colonial house with a wide porch, across which the light from the open front door was pouring. Two servants, who had evidently heard us coming, were waiting on the steps.

"This is the place I have dreamed of all my life!" I heard Lily Valentine's voice exclaiming from one of the automobiles.

The ladies ran quickly up the steps and into the broad hall. The rest of us followed, and, dropping

our coats, we turned to a big room at the left, running apparently along the whole length of the house, with a big brick fireplace at the end.

It was roughly finished, but it had been decorated and furnished by some one who had a fine eye for the picturesque, with heavy old tables and chairs, and with antlers, and bows and arrows, and rifles and sabres ornamenting the walls. Here and there, too, I noticed little mounds of pipes—many kinds of pipes. And in little nooks I was astonished to observe books, most of them, as my eye speedily detected, books of a sporting character.

“What a nice, ‘manny’ place!” said Lily Valentine, turning to our host. “No wonder you like being a bachelor.”

“I don’t like it!” Teddy retorted.

Miss Valentine sank into one of the big chairs and drew her arms together in an ecstasy of content. “Then you don’t deserve to remain one. You don’t know when you’re well off!”

Supper was shortly announced and, in spite of those sandwiches, we all went clamorously out into the dining-room, where we found waiting for us a beautifully decorated table, shining with candles, and with an open soup-tureen steaming in the centre. The supper proved to be really a dinner, and an elaborate dinner at that. We had more champagne and then a great deal of gaiety, in which Henderson and Cosgrave and Dick Ferris vied with one another. Mrs. Eustace led all the other women in the abandonment of her spirits; as the meal proceeded she grew more excited and vociferous. With Ferris she con-

ducted a mock flirtation, for the purpose, I suspected, of annoying Cosgrave, who, however, seemed to take it in very good part. I saw Alice glance at her from time to time with a covert and reproving eye. When we reached coffee, cigarettes and cigars were passed around, and the room was soon clouded with smoke. Suddenly Teddy startled us all by crying out:

“What do you people say to an automobile ride? There’s no speed-limit at this time of night.”

CHAPTER XVII

A LIVELY HOUSE PARTY

MRS. EUSTACE was the first to dart out of the room. "I must get my furs," she exclaimed. "I don't propose to freeze to death."

Away she went up the stairs, accompanied by a maid who had been lingering in the hall. Mrs. Henderson, looking at least ten years younger than she had appeared in her own house, followed, laughing immoderately and leading Letty by the hand. To my astonishment, I noticed that Letty appeared to enter into the spirit of the adventure.

"I suppose we must go," Alice remarked to me in the hall, and Lily Valentine, coming up at the moment, whispered, "Were n't they idiots? If actors behaved in this way on the road, they'd be arrested."

Holbrook, separated from the actress during the supper, had been in eclipse; but now he reassumed his radiance. "You'll have to sleep all day tomorrow, Lily," he said.

I was impressed by the instinctive way in which we had formed our little group. While we were lingering, the others were eagerly putting on their heavy outer garments.

"Say, you people are n't going to back out, are

you?" Monty called to us, and without answering in words we reluctantly prepared for the ride.

Suddenly Mrs. Eustace's voice sounded from the head of the stairs. "I dare everybody to slide down the baluster."

She looked very handsome and reckless as she stood up there, arrayed from head to foot in furs. In a flash the irrepressible little Monty was at her side. "Here goes!" he cried, and down he slid, touching the ground with his toes and giggling to the top of his voice. Mrs. Eustace followed, screaming, her arms extended and her hair flying about her fur cap. She landed with a force that threw her straight into Cosgrave's arms. He gave her a little squeeze, and as she pushed him back she said: "Why don't you take the dare? Let's see if you have any sand."

At that moment, Lily Valentine, Holbrook, and Ferris were fired with emulation. Up the stairs they scrambled. At sight of them, Cosgrave followed, and an excited discussion took place as to which should go first. Finally, at sight of Mrs. Henderson and Letty approaching, Dick Ferris insisted that precedence should be given them; but Mrs. Henderson shuddered at the proposal, and as Letty gently demurred, Lily Valentine darted forward and came down in a whirl of applause. Holbrook followed so quickly that he nearly knocked the girl off her feet.

"O scare-cat!" Mrs. Eustace called up to Cosgrave, who stood hesitating on the landing, with what seemed to me a rather pale face and angry eyes. At the words he started forward and began the descent, not deftly like the others, but uncertainly, dizzily.

When he had arrived half-way down he suddenly lurched to one side, made a somersault clear over the baluster, and fell heavily on the hall floor.

For a moment we were alarmed; but Cosgrave, red in the face, quickly picked himself up. Mrs. Eustace, who was bubbling with laughter, seized Dick Ferris by the arm, and the two rushed out on the porch. She seemed to be trying to emphasise her delight over Cosgrave's discomfiture.

"It's too wicked to keep the poor chauffeurs up so late!" cried Mrs. Henderson, as she made her way out on the porch.

"Well, there's no need of them anyway." Teddy fixed his eyes on the three fierce lights that were coming up the path. The big automobiles, as they stood inside the portico, looked like enormous illuminated beetles.

"Will there be room for us all?" Mrs. Eustace nervously gasped. Then, without waiting for a reply, she turned and said in a low voice: "Oh, bother the old chauffeurs. They'll only be in the way. You can manage one of those machines, can't you, Dick?" She spoke with a feverish authority, and I noticed that she kept her eyes away from Cosgrave's face.

It was quickly arranged that Ferris, Holbrook, and Teddy were to run the machines, and, without ceremony or even the pretence of order, we climbed into the seats. Alice and I kept together, and it was a great relief to me to find her sitting beside me. In front sat Dick Ferris with Mrs. Eustace; I was amused to note that Alice and I were not the only alert ones. In the automobile that faced us we saw

Holbrook with Letty Henderson at his side and with Lily Valentine and Cosgrave behind. Teddy brought up the rear with a strange assortment—the two elder Hendersons and Monty.

It took us only a few moments to get up speed, and we flew over the snow-covered roads, the cold air buzzing around our heads, the stars looking on, beautiful and severe, seeming in their calm to reproach us. We passed groups of low grey buildings which I supposed to be Teddy's stock-farm; but I decided not to distract the amateur chauffeur by asking questions. Even Mrs. Eustace had ceased to be voluble. On either side the bare boughs of the trees looked like ever-changing etchings. Our machines took each hill as if it were a declivity and, after a convulsive pause, they would plunge down with a torrent-like speed. At moments I felt as if I were on board ship in a fierce gale. It was glorious, exhilarating, and, if Alice had not been present, I should have been perfectly happy; but the thought that she was at the mercy of that reckless Dick Ferris gave me a sickly feeling of apprehension. I have often noticed what a damper marriage is on physical courage.

We must have gone a dozen miles when Ferris began to slow down. "Well!" he said, laughing triumphantly into Mrs. Eustace's face. "What d'ye think about turning back?"

We stood puffing while the others came up. After a great deal of shouting, it was decided that we should return by way of the farm and that Teddy should take the lead. So we started back by a side-

road, quickly resuming the old pace. The moon was going down and over the landscape hung a thin fog. The crisp cold had begun to turn to dampness. The small farmhouses seemed to dash past us like scenes in a panorama, leaving behind the occasional sound of a dog's futile barking.

As we approached the farm, the clouds that had partly obscured the moon passed, and the expanse of open country became bathed in a faint light, making a really magnificent spectacle. Dick Ferris shut off the speed.

"Now is n't that grand!" he exclaimed in his richest brogue. "Teddy must have nearly three hundred acres there."

"Did he plan all this himself?" I asked, letting my eyes roam over the farm-buildings.

"Every bit of it. He began as soon as he came into his property. He's a wonderful lad, that Teddy."

"Let's get him to take us over the place," said Mrs. Eustace, eagerly.

"Now?" Ferris gasped, with surprise and amusement. "Sure it would be an imposition on the animals."

"This is just the time," Mrs. Eustace insisted, "while we're in the mood. We'll be too tired tomorrow. Catch up, Dick," she urged, "and see what the others say."

In a few moments we overtook the other machines. Teddy expressed his readiness to guide us over the stock-farm then and there. "We have electric light in all the buildings," he explained.

We slowed down as we neared the farm and moved stealthily. The gates, at the entrance, were wide open, and we passed the little lodge where Teddy's manager lived. The first building we reached was the stable for the thoroughbreds. As Teddy switched on the electric lights the place focussed itself on our view like a picture in a cinematograph: on either side ran the stalls, the flanks of the horses visible here and there.

"Heavens!" cried Mrs. Eustace. "See them standing up at this hour of the night. Don't they ever go to sleep?"

"They sleep standing," Teddy grunted,—"that is," he added, "most of the time. They generally lie down for an hour or so during the night."

"You see, a good deal depends on the way they're bedded," Dick Ferris added, more graciously. "Did ye ever see such bedding? Look at the fresh straw, will you?"

"Ah, it's better to be a horse than a human being," Mrs. Eustace tragically remarked, and Dick Ferris added with a laugh, "Especially if ye can be a thoroughbred."

Teddy led us from stall to stall, giving us the name of each horse and occasionally a bit of pedigree. Three of the horses, he mentioned, had not yet come down from the Horse Show, and Dick Ferris added that one of these had taken a blue ribbon during the week. Mrs. Eustace declared that if she could live in a stable so sweet and clean and shining as that, she'd consider herself well off. "Have n't you ever noticed what delightful houses stables make?" she

flippantly asked. "Some friends of mine in Stockbridge have made a perfectly beautiful summer-house out of one of their stables."

Teddy, who seemed bored by Mrs. Eustace's comments, rather ostentatiously devoted himself to Alice and Letty; Dick Ferris, while Cosgrave lingered wearily in the background, kept volubly explaining the good points of the horses to his companion. I could hear him predicting that in five years Teddy would be recognised as the greatest breeder of horses and cattle in the country and as the owner of the finest stock-farm in the world. "Ye should see his cows!" he cried out. "Teddy, let's go to the cow-house."

"We're coming to that," Teddy replied in a growl, and he threw open the door, letting in a rush of icy air. "Don't let the horses catch cold," he admonished us, and in a moment we were standing under the stars again.

It seems absurd, it seems incredible, that with four strokes ringing in our ears, from the tower-clock of the carriage-house, we should actually have proceeded on a tour of that stock-farm. But no one, except Cosgrave, betrayed signs of fatigue; he plainly grew more and more resentful. We inspected Teddy's carriages, all kinds of carriages, including several that I had never seen before, one of which Dick Ferris explained had been specially built according to a design of Teddy's, high, low, broad, narrow, black, yellow, and red, and we admired Teddy's harnesses, with mountings of nickel-plate, silver-plate, and gold-plate. Then we visited the polo-ponies and the

cart-horses and the stallions. Mrs. Eustace kept insisting that she was crazy to see the cows, and when we finally reached the cow-house she fell into rhapsodies over the patient beasts lying on their haunches as they turned on us their big, pathetic eyes. "After all," she exclaimed, "I don't believe I should care to be a horse even if I could be a thoroughbred. It's so much more comfortable to be a cow."

"And take your siesta in the middle of the day," said Dick Ferris. "It's funny to see them squat down every day of their lives and go fast asleep."

It was cruel and I suppose it was vulgar that I should have kept wondering what effect our tour of inspection was having on Letty Henderson's mind. If Teddy had been a thousand times more adroit than he really was, I reflected, he could not have chosen a more ingenious way of showing his importance and his power. As he turned his sharp little eyes on his property, dropping a quiet word here and there, he must have assumed in the girl's eyes some of the proportions of a hero.

When we had inspected the kennels, which, on our appearance, burst into an uproar, Mrs. Eustace insisted that we should be taken down to the race-track. So back into the automobiles we climbed and away we sped. Already, faint melancholy streaks were appearing in the east.

"We might as well make a night of it," Mrs. Henderson said cheerfully.

I did not quite appreciate the logic of this philosophy; but I acquiesced. When we reached the track, we found that only faint traces of snow had

been left on it. As the three automobiles slowed up and lingered together, Mrs. Eustace exclaimed:

"Oh, would n't it be great if we could have a race over the course!"

"Well, let me get out first!" Mrs. Henderson cried in alarm, appreciating the speed with which Mrs. Eustace's suggestions were usually acted on.

"No race for me!" Lily Valentine said with decision. "I prefer to die in my bed!"

"We might have a race for the chauffeurs," said Dick Ferris, plainly to humour Mrs. Eustace.

A mass of furs rose from one of the automobiles; and Mrs. Eustace leaped from the machine before it could be stopped.

"I object to my manager's risking his life!" cried Lily Valentine, and I noted that there was more than apprehension in her voice, something very like emotion.

"Oh, I'm all right, Lily," said Holbrook reassuringly. "Be gamey."

"Who has a stop-watch?" As Mrs. Eustace spoke I had a realising sense of the quality in her that had brought her into the ranks of the divorced and into the complication with which she was even now entangling herself. I also realised what was more serious, the way in which her recklessness could involve others.

"Here's a watch," said Teddy, holding out his arm toward Mrs. Eustace. "It's not a stop-watch; but it will do just as well."

"How many times around in a mile?" Mrs. Eustace breathlessly asked. "Let's make it short and

sharp, or we shall simply perish out here. Now we must have a prize for the chauffeur who makes the mile in the best time—a prize offered by the ladies. What shall it be? Let's make it a diamond pin. We'll attend to the details afterward."

Cosgrave was observing the proceedings with a supercilious expression in his face. In the grey light, he looked curiously old and bitter. Somehow his attitude conveyed a sense of detachment at once amusing and pathetic.

The automobiles lined up slowly, and at the word from Mrs. Eustace they moved forward. Holbrook was the first to take the lead, and in a few seconds he had gained several yards on the two others, who kept closely together. He gradually increased his advantage and Teddy drew away from Ferris. When they neared us again they were moving with such speed that it was difficult to tell them apart. They passed us with a fearful din which drowned out our cries. Holbrook and Ferris, I perceived, were bending forward, but Teddy was seated erect, with an air of easy control. It was fine to see them round the curves and sweep up the track. As they approached us a second time, I saw that both Teddy and Ferris were gaining on Holbrook and that Teddy was driving Ferris to the edge of the track in an effort to pass him. In our excitement we ran towards the opposite corner, and at the turn we saw Teddy fairly leap toward Holbrook, leaving Ferris behind. Then we hurried back to our first position. Teddy and Holbrook came roaring down together, with Holbrook on the inside, resisting Teddy's effort to ride round

him and to wrest his advantage. The next moment, Ferris shot past, in mad pursuit and plainly gaining. Again we ran to the other side as Holbrook and Teddy turned in parallel curves, with Ferris close behind. We strained our eyes to follow, and we watched Teddy moving slowly ahead of Holbrook, keeping at one side and making a desperate effort to run his machine close to the track. Suddenly a human figure rose in the air, turned several times, and fell heavily on the ground. One machine kept moving furiously, radiating a fierce light, and the other, its light quenched and seemingly enveloped in fog, made a black spot on the landscape, tumbling along the track and then remaining stationary. Toward this spot Ferris was approaching with terrific speed, but, with a quick turn, he dodged it and went on.

I was vaguely aware that, as I watched, I heard fearful screams of women, in which Alice's voice was mingled.

Then Mrs. Eustace cried hysterically: "Some one is killed!"

CHAPTER XVIII

AN EARLY MATINÉE

I RAN with all my might, slipping here and there over the frozen ground, and with Monty beside me. I could hear the others running behind us, and I saw the two automobiles tearing back to that black spot. As we approached, I saw Ferris and Holbrook bending over the limp figure of Teddy. The ghastly light of the morning seemed focussed on the boy's white face.

Holbrook was pressing his ear against Teddy's side. "I don't get the heart-beat," he whispered.

Ferris began to tear off Teddy's thick gloves. "He must have struck his head, the poor chap!" he said, and I was impressed by the affection and the pity in the voice. I lifted Teddy's shoulders from the hard ground. It was ghastly to see the head fall back.

At that moment Cosgrave came up and he looked on helplessly; then he offered a practical suggestion that at once roused us. "Get him into the house and telephone for some doctors."

I glanced up and I saw Letty Henderson approaching, followed by Alice and, at some distance, by the others. Letty looked as if she might at any moment fall to the ground from weakness. On seeing Teddy,

she uttered a smothered cry, threw herself on the ground, took his face in her arms, and pressed her cheek against it, bursting into tears and wailing aloud.

We were all stupefied.

"We must get him back to the house," Cosgrave repeated, and his authority of manner relieved the situation.

The elder Hendersons stood apart. Their faces wore a look of hopeless defeat, painful to see. They gazed at Teddy as one might view the wreck of a ship or a collapsed building.

Alice took Letty by the arm and drew her away. I remember wondering why in that emergency Mrs. Henderson did not protect her daughter; but she seemed dazed. Henderson came with Mrs. Eustace just as Ferris and I lifted Teddy into one of the automobiles. I held the boy in my arms and Ferris took control of the machine, and Letty and Alice rode in the back seat. As we approached the house, Letty kept bending forward and brushing Teddy's face with her handkerchief and moaning.

"He's dead! Oh, I know he's dead!" she repeated again and again.

A middle-aged woman whom I had seen in the house received us and with our burden we went to the nearest bedroom. Meanwhile, one of the servants telephoned for the nearest physician. Other servants quickly removed Teddy's outer garments and bathed his face. He gave no sign of life.

Letty and Alice were busying themselves about the room, doing a thousand things, apparently, I could not tell what. A fearful bustle went on about us.

It was only keeping us, I felt sure, from facing the truth.

How the others got back, I cannot remember. I only know that, after a time, I heard their voices in the hall. Then some one proposed that Ferris or Holbrook go in an automobile with one of the servants for a guide and bring the doctor.

It struck me as strange that no one had thought of that before.

For a long time there was running about and weeping and telephoning to New York. Meanwhile, we all grew convinced that, though Teddy might not be dead, he could not possibly be saved. I recall going from room to room in that strange house and finding everything familiar. I felt as if I had been there for weeks. I suppose we were all a little crazy.

At last the local doctor came, a slight, blond young man with a little mustache. He carried a little bag like the bag doctors carry on the stage, and he had a curiously superficial and inadequate air. Ferris and I followed him into the room. He made a quick examination, and he announced that Teddy was not dead, but he doubted if much could be done.

His indifferent manner alarmed me. But, having delivered his opinion, he sent Holbrook back in the automobile for his electric batteries, and he set desperately to work.

Two hours later Teddy gave signs of life. I had the good fortune to be the one to break the news to the guests downstairs. They included every one in the house party except Letty and her mother, who, on the arrival of the doctor, had disappeared. Alice

volunteered to tell Letty, and the others announced that they were going to bed.

"I suppose we ought to leave as soon as we can," said Mrs. Eustace. "But there's no train till the afternoon." Then she maliciously added: "Of course, the Hendersons will stay. They seem to own Teddy now."

Mrs. Eustace walked into the hall and I followed, to see if Alice were coming down again. The others waved their hands to us and went upstairs.

"It does seem rather stupid to go to bed at this time," she said.

I was leaning forward to pick up a piece of paper that I had noticed on the floor. "Here's something that must have dropped out of some one's pocket," I said.

"Teddy's probably," Mrs. Eustace remarked, absently, and as I looked at the writing she glanced over my shoulder. We both read the first few lines in a large masculine hand.

". . . been pretty patient about your matters. When you gave me the diamonds in pledge, it was understood that you were to redeem them within three days, and it was on that assurance I lent you the fifteen hundred dollars. Now I——"

Mechanically I let my hand drop. "It's evidently a private letter," I said, and I resisted an inclination to hold the paper behind my back. Somehow, I could not look into Mrs. Eustace's face.

"It's mine," she said, quietly, and she reached out.

Then I looked at her and was startled by the expression in her eyes. They fairly crackled.

"Yours?" I repeated, in amazement.

She bowed with a dignity that I had not noticed in her before. "I must have dropped it from my fur coat."

I had just one of two things to do: either to accuse her of lying and of wishing to pry into the private affairs of some one else, or to give up the letter. So I gave up the letter, and I have never done an act of politeness with so miserable a conscience.

Mrs. Eustace walked serenely upstairs, giving me a smile over the baluster, from the very spot where Cosgrave had come a-cropper. "It's hardly good-night, I suppose," she said. "Perhaps it ought to be good-morning."

"Pleasant dreams to you," I replied, without meaning to be disagreeable, and I was relieved when she disappeared. Too nervous to keep still, I began to pace the hall. The whole house was wrapped in silence, and I inwardly shivered. Perhaps it was the events of the night, perhaps it was loss of sleep—but something had given me a sense of the horror of life. Could it be that not twelve hours had passed since Alice and I were at the Horse Show? Our little apartment seemed a haven of peace now—impreguably fortified against danger.

My thought was so morbid, hectic, perhaps I ought to say, that I had a guilty sense on hearing my name called in a whisper. I walked out into the hall and I saw Alice at the head of the stairs. She beckoned to me and I followed her into the suite that had been assigned to us, a big room filled with heavy old furniture, two dressing-rooms, and a bath.

"This looks comfortable," I said, surveying the place, but Alice was in no mood to discuss material things.

"I've been talking with Letty's mother," she exclaimed, still whispering, though no one could possibly hear us. "She says she's known all along that Letty was in love with him."

"Well, that's a good joke on you," I replied, reproducing her manner of deep secrecy.

"What was?" Alice said with indignant innocence.

"She fooled you all right."

"It was certainly very remarkable," Alice acknowledged. "Of course, if he lives, he'll get her now."

"You mean that some one will tell him how she behaved—her mother, I suppose."

"She'll want to marry him. That is, of course—" Alice checked herself. "The doctors say he is going to live."

"Why will she want to marry him? Do you mean that she'll consider herself compromised by that rush of sympathy?"

"She'll think that she's in love with him."

"Well, won't she be?"

"As much as she is now," Alice oracularly replied.

"Well, it's too deep for me!" I exclaimed.

"It's perfectly simple. For a long time now Teddy has been in her imagination. At first, she hated him, or she thought she did. That may have been mere obstinacy. Then he piqued her interest. For the past few days at the Horse Show he's been a great personage. And, then, to-night here——"

"He's been It!" I concluded.

"The accident took place at exactly the right psychological moment. The only danger is——"

"Of his dying."

"Of her dying—from shame," Alice corrected, with a faint smile.

"Shame does n't kill."

"Of course," Alice went on, scorning my wisdom, "the excitement rather kept her from realising to-night. But when she wakes up in the morning it will be perfectly awful for her."

"Especially if she hears that Teddy has eaten a hearty breakfast. The only decent thing for him to do is to propose marriage at once."

"He'll have to get all these people out of the house first."

"Including ourselves."

"Mrs. Henderson has asked us to stay till Monday."

I thought of Mrs. Eustace. "Well, she *is* running things, is n't she?"

"She says our staying will make it easier for Letty. And she says that Teddy likes us both ever so much."

"So she has begun to interpret Teddy already, has she? Poor Teddy! Think of those two people as *In-Laws* for life."

In reproof of my flippancy, Alice turned away. "I must get some sleep," she said.

"Well, I've never been so wide-awake in my life. I'm going downstairs to read."

Then I thought of that letter-episode; but, fearing that a little more agitation would keep Alice awake, I resolved to say nothing about it for the present.

I tiptoed through the hall, pausing for a moment to

listen at Teddy's door, without hearing a sound, and I then went down-stairs. In the fire place of the big living-room where I had observed the books and the pipes, I was delighted to find that two enormous logs were blazing. I chose a mild-looking pipe, filled it with some tobacco from a bowl on one of the tables, picked up a book, and settled myself comfortably. I only made a pretence of reading, for the warmth from the fire gradually soothed me and I should certainly have fallen sound asleep if I had not heard a rustle of skirts. I looked around and saw Lily Valentine, enveloped in a loose blue silk gown half-covered with filmy lace that had big yellow butterflies woven in it. Her hair hung down her back in a long braid. I had never seen her look so pretty and picturesque.

She made a little squeak of alarm, and I jumped, laughing, from my seat. When she saw my face, she looked relieved.

"Oh, it's only the dramatist," she said. "I could n't sleep and I grew so nervous that I could n't even stay in bed. I thought I could steal down and get a book without any one's seeing me." She shivered, unnecessarily, I thought, for the house was warm enough, and she drew the silk and lace closely about her thin figure. "Don't you think this place is spooky?"

"I suppose any place is apt to seem spooky if you've been staying up all night."

"I'm going to sit in your chair," the actress went on, still shivering. "You draw up another, won't you? Now don't look at my feet." She drew her knees toward her chin, but not before I had caught

a glimpse of pink and white toes peering out of little sandals.

"You don't mind, do you?" Lily Valentine resumed. "You see, I'm so used to running about in the theatre in *négligé* that I suppose I've become positively brazen. Still," —she glanced apprehensively at the door,— "I don't want to be caught by those society people," she said. "I have to be awfully circumspect before them. People who are n't actors are so queer. That's one beautiful thing about the theatre: no one ever misunderstands—trifles, I mean. But *these*," she added scornfully, with a turn of her pretty wrist, "they're always ready to think the most dreadful things."

"At this moment Society is sound asleep!" I remarked.

"Yes, I suppose that for them seven o'clock in the morning is the witching hour of night. Well, it is for me, too, usually." Then her face brightened. "Has n't it been exciting? Do you know, it all seemed unreal to me? I kept thinking of it as a play. It made me so cross. It's such a privilege to be in a real tragedy, is n't it? I've assisted at so few. With me, it's been comedy principally—and farce."

"I suppose all terrible things seem unreal to the people who are going through them," I said, unable to resist making a fine literary generalisation.

"Well, that sounds awfully deep. I wonder if it's really so," Miss Valentine calmly retorted. I don't think that she meant to snub me; she was merely used to doing what most of us frequently do not dare to do, expressing exactly what she thought.

"And then Letty Henderson," she went on, "making that scene! And doing it just like an actress. Positively, it took my breath away. The only thing I missed was the footlights. Foolish girl," she added reflectively, "to give herself away like that!"

"Maybe they're engaged," I dishonestly remarked, with some vague notion of being chivalrous.

Miss Valentine gave me a reproachful look. "I hope they will be *soon*," she said with a significance that made me realise how accurately she had duplicated my train of thought. "Well, let's talk about pleasant things. Have you been a good boy and done a lot of work?"

"I've done some work," I evasively replied. "I'm not sure it's good work."

"Dear me! What conscious modesty. The great thing is to get work done—good or bad. Now I'm going to tell you a secret. We've been ordered off to the road on next Saturday night. The announcement of the last week is to be made in the papers this morning."

"That is, indeed, a secret," I said with a smile. "Thank you for this mark of confidence."

"And do you know what that means unless you write a perfectly great play? It means a heart-breaking tour for me all winter. You have my life in your hands."

"I appreciate the responsibility," I replied with a gravity not altogether assumed.

"They're nearly famished for attractions—the managers here. Everything is falling down. So there's some consolation for me. If we put your

play on and it's a go, I may be able to get back to New York before the winter's over. There's going to be a great deal doing that I don't care to miss. Now I've been thinking of that entrance of mine on horseback."

"Yes?" I said, apprehensively, feeling as people do when warding off danger.

"I don't like it. In the first place, it's been done to the death in dozens of old pieces."

"I thought it was quite original!" I gasped.

"That's because you go to the literary things. From those anæmic plays you'd never know that a horse existed. Can you imagine Ibsen introducing any healthy animal into a play of his? I don't suppose you've seen a melodrama since you were a boy. In the melodramas heroines are always entering on horseback. Now I don't look well on a horse."

I started to protest.

"Don't. This is business. I know. Besides, I'm not especially graceful, and I don't believe I could make that jump to the ground with the proper *sang-froid* and authority. And on the first night"—Miss Valentine pressed her hands against her ears in an ecstasy of anguish—"on the first night I should simply die of fright for fear the horse would jump over the foot-lights or something awful would happen. Suppose I should get my feet entangled in the stirrups! And if the first entrance went wrong, it would be all up with me for the rest of the evening. And think what would happen to the play."

"I will change that entrance!" I promptly declared.

"A nice demure entrance would be better, I'm sure," Miss Valentine resumed sweetly. "And you're going to give me plenty of comedy, are n't you? Of course, I still want emotional intensity too; but people are used to seeing me in comedy, and they love to be amused. Some day, I'm going to make them accept me in a great big rôle; but not yet awhile. I'll wait till I understand more about life. Do you know," she went on with an eagerness that made me suspect the night's adventures had left her a little hysterical, "I believe that's the great trouble with me. I went on the stage too young. It's all nonsense, the talk of the old-fashioned actors about the earlier the training the better, as if acting were just a matter of habit. If it's worth anything, it must have some basis of intellectuality."

"True!" I said, with a seriousness which kept in check an inclination to smile. I wished that Alice might be present to hear this girl lay down the law about art. "But don't you think," I ventured to say, "that actors gain a good deal by just going on with their work and by travelling?"

"A precious lot there is to be gained in that way!" Miss Valentine retorted. She must have suspected patronage. "What is to be learned from the rubbish that most of them play in? And as for travelling, the most they learn is that hotels are the deadliest, dreariest places in the world, and that there's no place like New York. You can't *live* on the road; you can't even read anything except the cheap magazines that you buy on the trains, and then, every minute, you're wearing your eyes out. Travelling!

I consider that just so much time taken out of my life."

I think I should have resented Miss Valentine's scolding manner if I had not reflected that the poor child needed sleep.

"There's nothing in acting except for the few who are big successes." The girl rested her chin in her hand and mused. "And, by the way." She leaned eagerly toward me. "You're keeping the cast down, are n't you? Don't have any superfluous people. The smaller the cast the better. And oh! don't have many women in. They're such a trial. After all, people pay to see the star, don't they?"

"I suppose they do," I assented, beginning to feel sick at heart. If Miss Valentine made many more restrictions, I should find it hard to go on with the play. Already, I reflected, with painful anxiety, I had introduced five women beside the star. I resolved not to tell her.

"I would n't make the leading man's part too strong, if I were you. There's a pretty serious danger there. Yesterday, after that *matinée*, I felt too tired to change and I had dinner sent into my dressing-room and went over the book again. It quite frightened me to see how strong Prescott was."

"Francesca has all the sympathy," I hastily asserted.

"I know, but audiences—especially women—are attracted by men-characters with a streak of the devil in them. I'm so afraid that you're going to make Francesca too good."

We heard steps on the stairs and Miss Valentine

looked alarmed. She drew her dress more tightly around her feet.

"It's probably one of the servants," I said. "Besides," I added, to reassure her, "it's nearly eight o'clock in the morning, hardly an hour for a rendezvous."

"Eight o'clock, is it possible?" She surveyed the place with an air of bewilderment. "I'm all mixed up. Now that you mention the time, I begin to feel hungry."

The imposing presence of Cosgrave presented itself at the door. He wore a loose-fitting tweed suit with a jacket reaching almost to his knees. His clothes reminded me that I was still in evening dress.

"Early risers?" said Cosgrave, with a faint tinge of sarcasm, and Lily Valentine, literally clinging to her feet with both hands, replied: "Mr. Foster does not deserve any credit. He's been up all night. I'm the early riser."

Cosgrave smiled with supercilious humour. His eyes were roaming over the floor.

"Lost anything?" Miss Valentine asked, and Cosgrave's face grew pink.

"I dropped part of a letter out of my pocket last night. I thought it might be here."

"Possibly in the hall," said Miss Valentine with a malicious inflection that conveyed a reference to Cosgrave's exhibition of the night before.

"It's of no importance," he said, and he walked unceremoniously out of the room. We heard him moving about in the hall and we talked loudly about commonplace subjects, as people do when they think

some one is listening. Through the windows we saw him cross the porch and start down the path, still keeping his eyes on the ground.

"He's actually going for a constitutional," cried Lily Valentine in amazement, and I said nothing.

One of the servants came down. The doctors, he said, had announced that all danger was passed and that the patient was not likely to suffer any serious consequences from the accident. Then he proposed that he bring some coffee and eggs. "We can serve them here, sir." He glanced tentatively from the actress to me.

Lily Valentine shook her head. "In my room, if you please," she said, and smiling at me, she added, "I suppose Mr. Foster will want to breakfast with his wife."

I replied that I would eat downstairs, and the servant withdrew. Then Miss Valentine rose precipitately to her feet. "I feel as if both my legs were broken," she whispered, and she walked limply across the room. "I'm going to get back before any one else catches me," and, forgetting the book she had come for, she passed into the hall.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MORNING AFTER

OUR little talk had depressed me and for a few moments I sat limply in front of the fire. I perceived now with a powerful vividness that there was many a slip between play-writing and production. No wonder dramatists wore out their lives waiting for their chance, and, when they thought the chance had come, discovered it to be an illusion. Even if the play were put into rehearsal, a mere whim of this girl's might make all my work futile. I recalled play after play that had actually been announced for production and then had passed quietly into oblivion. Fortunately, I was aroused from my torpor by the return of the servant.

"Mrs. Henderson is coming down to breakfast, sir. We shall serve it at nine o'clock."

I leaped to my feet and hurried up-stairs. It was ridiculous, my remaining in those evening clothes. Alice was sleeping peacefully and I tried not to wake her. I took an ice-cold bath to rouse myself, shaved, and dressed quickly. When I went down again, Mrs. Henderson was in the living-room engaged in earnest talk with her husband. They seemed to be on a new basis of intimacy; they looked as if they had enjoyed a good rest, and their faces positively glowed. When

I asked for Miss Henderson, the girl's father rubbed his hands and answered with a fine heartiness: "She is sound asleep, poor child. It was such a shock to her, Teddy's accident. When she wakes up, she'll doubtless feel much better."

The servant entered to announce breakfast. Mrs. Henderson sat at the head of the table and her husband took the place opposite. They both had a proprietary air. They radiated satisfaction and good cheer.

"Are we the only early birds?" said Mrs. Henderson, as she manipulated the coffee-urn.

I explained that Cosgrave must be wandering about not far off.

"Oh, there's no knowing when *he'll* come back," Mrs. Henderson amiably remarked. "Those artistic people are so erratic."

They asked if I had been able to sleep and, when I replied that I had not gone to bed at all, Mrs. Henderson expressed solicitude.

"After all," said Henderson grandly, "man is a nocturnal animal. In the savage state he used to go out only at night, in order to avoid other animals, bigger, that used to prey on him. Really, I never feel so bright in the morning as I do when I've either had two or three hours' sleep or have n't gone to bed at all."

I felt that Mrs. Henderson was undergoing a temporary eclipse; for a few moments, she looked quite fatigued around the eyes.

"Take the Negro in the South, for example," Henderson went on, "you know how dull and shiftless

he is by day,—too lazy to move. Ah, but at night he is another creature. You'll find him five miles away from home, tearing along the road, his eyes shining. After all, civilisation moves in a circle. After a certain point is reached, the nearer we approach the savage."

I was enchanted with this unexpected burst of eloquence. I thought I could foresee what Henderson would become with large prosperity and ease, and I realised how dearly his wife would have to pay for her succession of dazzling gowns and dinner-parties. Think of having to listen to him for a whole lifetime!

Between Henderson's inflations, Mrs. Henderson would occasionally introduced a personal remark. She explained that she was so glad that Letty had made a friend like Alice; it was a great help to a young girl to know an older woman; and Letty had such confidence in Alice's advice. I could not tell whether she was trying merely to be polite or was covertly ridiculing Alice and me and crowing over us. If Alice had been there, she would have known in a jiffy.

After breakfast, on seeing that Alice was still asleep, I decided to go out for a walk. I made my way along the path we had taken the night before and then turned into the road leading to the farm. The cold, clear air vibrated with sunshine, and the boughs of the trees, ice-laden, gleamed as if decorated with gems. In the daylight the farm looked even more vast and impressive than it had appeared the night before. The buildings seemed to have almost

doubled in size. Everywhere there was a sense of order, and prosperity and wholesome cleanliness.

I walked down the incline leading to the race-track and, across the field, I saw two figures. They proved to be Mrs. Eustace and Dick Ferris. They waved their hands to me, and as I approached them I saw that they had come on the same errand as my own.

"You must have stolen out of the house," I said, and Mrs. Eustace shrugged her shoulders: "We knew you were in there; but I object to eating the first meal of the day *en famille*. So I had some coffee sent up." In spite of their exceedingly cordial greeting, I saw that they were annoyed at this intrusion. They had plainly expected to be alone. I wondered if they had encountered Cosgrave; but I avoided mentioning his name.

Teddy's automobile had been left where it lay the night before, and it was a pitiful sight. It was turned completely over, and one of the tires, suspended in the air, was soft to flabbiness. One wheel was twisted out of shape and the backs of the seats were completely demolished; little piles of *débris*, showing the course of the machine after the accident, zig-zagged along the track.

"One of the tires must have burst," said Ferris, critically examining the wreck, "and the poor boy must have lost control of the machine."

"Oh, well, he's lucky to have escaped with his life," said Mrs. Eustace philosophically. She seemed to have forgotten that it was she who had inspired the foolhardy race.

I was trying to think of an excuse to help me to

escape, when I looked up and saw Cosgrave across the track. Mrs. Eustace grew red in the face and then white around the lips. As Cosgrave approached, she ostentatiously turned her back. The painter nodded to us and, walking straight up to Mrs. Eustace, he said:

"Are n't you afraid of catching cold out here? You'd better go back to the house."

She looked at him without replying. Ferris watched the encounter, his little blue eyes bright with astonishment.

"I don't think I need any assistance from you, Mr. Cosgrave, in the care of my health."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Cosgrave said, in a low voice, and he turned away.

"I do think we ought to go back, honest," Dick Ferris interposed, in his soothing brogue and his most conciliatory manner. "I have n't had any breakfast yet," he said, with a smile.

So we returned together, talking aimlessly and trying not to appear ill at ease. Mrs. Eustace walked with lofty unconcern, acting as if Cosgrave were not present, and addressing herself almost exclusively to Ferris in a familiar, almost caressing tone.

As we stepped on the porch of the house, Lily Valentine, who from the hall had seen us approaching, came bounding out in a charming grey cloth frock. She was evidently in very good humour. "Our invalid has just had breakfast," she announced, "and the doctors say he can come down-stairs for a little while by-and-by." She extended her hands out from her ears in wild burlesque. "But you should see his

head! I've just had a glimpse of him; they would n't let me go in. He's covered with bandages to the tip of his nose." She suddenly faced Cosgrave. "Have you found your letter?" she cried.

"What letter was that?" Mrs. Eustace asked sharply, fixing her eyes for the first time on Cosgrave.

"Nothing of any account," he said carelessly.

"I think you must mean this," she said, and, with an impressive indifference to what she had said to me only a few hours before, she drew the sheet from the muff that she carried and passed it to him.

"Oh, thank you," he replied, and, as he walked into the house, Mrs. Eustace said to the actress in a loud voice: "Dick Ferris is going to drive me to Westland. There's a train for New York at eleven o'clock."

When I went up-stairs, Alice was wide-awake. I rapidly gave an account of the events since she had gone to bed. "I don't see why we can't take the eleven o'clock train from Westland too," I concluded.

"And abandon Letty?" said Alice.

"It seems to me she has abandoned us."

"She did n't know her own mind," Alice declared. "I've said that all along."

I could not recall Alice's saying it, but I let the remark stand. "It will be interesting to know how she'll explain."

"She won't explain," Alice prophesied with an air of profound conviction.

"I hope you have n't said anything *against* Teddy."

Alice became indignant. "As if I'd do anything so foolish."

"It's bad enough to have heard her speak against him. I don't see how she can ever forgive you that."

"Oh, Edward, if women were the deep, scheming creatures that you pretend to think they are, it would n't be possible to live."

I fairly gasped. I stared at Alice, speechless.

"Every girl who cares for a man feels unsettled, and uncertain at first. You know perfectly well that when I first saw you I positively hated you."

That last remark silenced me. I could not endure the comparison.

After a long interval, Alice resumed: "It's really very pleasant, taking breakfast in bed. And then the excitement of the past twelve hours has done me a lot of good."

I heard a light feminine step and some one knocked. I bolted into the dressing-room, and a moment later Mrs. Henderson was addressing Alice. Through the closed door I could catch only a faint murmur of voices. Then there was silence. I opened the door and found the room empty. So I surmised that Alice had slipped on her dressing-gown and gone over to see Letty. For a half-hour I waited for her to return. Finally she entered the room. In her eyes there was a look of exaltation, as well as the traces of tears.

"She's much better," said Alice, speaking as from a great height.

"Does n't feel ashamed?" I ventured.

"Ashamed!" Alice looked hurt. But she would not condescend to come down and meet me on my

level. "She has a very beautiful nature," said Alice, speaking as one who has just left a cathedral.

"Well, any news?" I asked.

Alice hesitated. I knew that she did not like my manner; but there was something in her mind that she wished to say. At last, she remarked, somewhat haughtily, "He has asked her mother to bring her to him."

"With those bandages on his head!"

Alice received this remark with silent contempt.

Finally I said, in a whisper, "Has she gone?"

Alice gave vent to a deep luxurious sigh. "She's changing her dress."

I went down-stairs again, and I found Mrs. Eustace, wrapped in furs, saying good-bye to the Hendersons. "I suppose I shall perish on that long drive," she said, "but I will never enter an automobile again—never as long as I live," she repeated in a loud voice. She kissed Lily Valentine affectionately. "What in the world are you going to do?" she said, without offering to take her along.

"I'm going on the same train," the actress nonchalantly replied. "I've sent up to Mr. Manager—he and Monty, I suppose, are sound asleep—and he'll go with me in one of the automobiles. But we sha'n't start for ages yet."

Not a word was said about Cosgrave. I wondered what had become of him.

We saw the pair off and returned to the house with a feeling of desolateness, which I attributed to the disappearance of Dick Ferris. "Is n't it horrid when a nice party like this is spoiled!" said Lily

Valentine, petulantly. "I thought I should have a good rest from the theatre and go back feeling fresh. There are times when I positively hate New York."

She remained cross till her departure with Holbrook, who appeared just as the automobile came puffing up to the porch. He seemed to be in his most genial humour, and I suspected that he was glad to escape and that he was especially pleased to carry Miss Valentine away with him. Just as they were about to start, Cosgrave suddenly burst out on the porch carrying a grip in his hand.

"Oh, I say, are n't you going to take me along?" he cried, and Holbrook, making a brave effort to hide his disappointment, answered, "Why, yes, old chap, of course."

I returned to Alice, who was just finishing dressing, and I gave her the messages that the departing guests had left for her. She was especially interested in the news of Cosgrave's leave-taking.

"It's a good joke on him to have to go up in the same train with her," I said.

Alice was absorbed in following her own thought. "Of course, it's all very flattering to him," she said.

"To Cosgrave?" I cried in astonishment.

Alice shook her head impatiently. "I hope that he won't misunderstand it," she impetuously continued, as if conferring with herself.

"Ferris!" I exclaimed, a light breaking on my consciousness. "Dick Ferris—that nice, simple— Oh!"

"He's not nearly so simple as he acts," said Alice, "and he knows perfectly well what he wants." Then she abruptly changed the subject.

We lunched at one o'clock,—the Hendersons, Doctor Perrin, a rather nervous and exceedingly self-conscious man with a staccato voice and rasping manner of speech. Mrs. Henderson announced that her daughter felt unequal to coming down-stairs, and that Monty had not as yet waked up. In the Hendersons I observed a manner which suggested the words of the hymn, "Peace, perfect Peace." Henderson's conversation took on a tone that had in it a religious exaltation. The Doctor was plainly impressed by him. Occasionally, the Doctor would express opinions with which Henderson did not agree, and Henderson would set him right with a quiet and easy deliberateness. At the close of the meal, the Doctor went up-stairs with the Hendersons to take a last look at the patient before leaving for New York. Alice and I returned to the living-room. On his return, as the Doctor passed the hall to the porch, we heard him say: "It's really marvellous,—his recuperative power. In the past two hours he has become another man."

"Ah, it's such a comfort," said Mrs. Henderson, fervently. "He has so much to live for."

Mrs. Henderson bade the Doctor good-bye and we heard him starting off in an automobile. Then she entered the living-room. Her face was flushed and her eyes were glowing with a triumph that had in it a curiously malignant and sinister suggestion.

"Mrs. Foster," she said, going up to Alice and extending both hands, "I have something to tell you. I know it will make you and Mr. Foster very, very happy, just as it has made Mr. Henderson and me. Our daughter has just become engaged."

CHAPTER XX

MRS. HENDERSON MEETS THE SITUATION

THOUGH Alice and I had been prepared for the announcement, it nevertheless shocked us. Alice was the first to recover. "How perfectly delightful!" she exclaimed with a whole-souled enthusiasm that even in the veteran of society must have aroused sincere admiration.

"Letty has been fond of Theodore for a long, long time," Mrs. Henderson resumed with a beautiful suavity. Already she looked as if a fearful load of trouble had been lifted from her and she had grown finer, smoother, younger, and more serene. "But she is such a reserved creature, one would never suspect it, though, of course, it has been plain to her father and me." She lifted her eyebrows in humorous deprecation. "I really believe she did n't know herself till last night when she saw poor dear Theodore lying out there in the snow." Mrs. Henderson's eyes became suffused with tears; her shoulders rose in a luxurious sigh. "She's with him now. It's sweet to see them together. He's holding both her hands. He says he can't realize that it's all true, and he can't bear to let her go. The dear infants!"

A servant entered to make some inquiry about dinner, and Mrs. Henderson became absorbed in prac-

Mrs. Henderson Meets the Situation 291

tical affairs. Alice and I walked cautiously into a corner of the room; an unkind observer might say that we skulked. Something that the servant mentioned caused Mrs. Henderson, oblivious of us, to walk quickly out of the room.

Alice and I stared into each other's eyes for a long, long time.

"Does n't that teach us a lesson?" I whispered with deep impressiveness, and I gave myself credit for using the first personal pronoun.

"I know exactly what you're going to say, Ned." Alice spoke feverishly. "But the rebuke is enough without any moralising. Besides," she illogically added, "I have n't interfered nearly as much as you think. But, oh, is n't it dreadful to see any one wallowing in such a triumph!"

We heard steps on the stairs, and we fell into a guilty silence. Then Monty entered the room. We had actually forgotten that he was in the house, and we both uttered little gasps of surprise. He looked sleepy and bleary-eyed.

"Well," he said, sinking into a seat near us, "where is everybody?"

When we explained, he grew peevish. "They might have waked me up. Here's a whole Sunday gone to waste. I might have got in a half-dozen calls this afternoon." He energetically rubbed his face with both hands. "Gee! it's awful, this sitting up all night."

Alice and I regarded him with as much tolerance as we could assume.

"Have you had breakfast?" said Alice, and Monty

replied, in the tone I have often heard boys employ in response to maternal solicitude: "Oh, I had some tea and toast,—all I wanted."

I felt a remote impulse to assault Monty.

"Where's Letty?" the boy asked, looking around, as if he expected to see her hiding somewhere. His manner suggested that, by not being present, the girl had done him an injury.

"She's in Mr. Markoe's room," said Alice.

Then Monty woke up. His eyes grew larger; his face flushed.

"Well, Teddy's all right, is n't he?" he breathlessly asked. "The servant that brought my breakfast——"

"Oh, yes," said Alice with an absent-minded air, and I saw that she was enjoying the luxury of keeping back the great news.

Then Monty's figure became electrical. "I'll bet those two people are engaged!" he cried out. He looked sharply at Alice and then he fixed his gaze on me.

Alice and I sat in silence.

"Do you know anything about it?" he asked, but, being uncertain as to which of us was addressed, we offered no answer.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Monty said under his breath, and he went on with indignation: "This is no place for me. I intend to get out."

We heard Mrs. Henderson's voice in the hall and Monty shot from the room. A whispered talk followed, not a word of which reached us. Then skirts rustled up the stairs and Monty came back.

Mrs. Henderson Meets the Situation 293

"Have you heard the news?" he said to us in a strained voice, and Alice replied: "Yes, we've heard it."

He made no reference to our insincerity of a few moments before. He was absorbed. At last he said, speaking to himself: "No train for three hours. I've a good mind to walk." Then he lifted his head and stared at us: "What are you people staying for?"

"Because Letty wishes us to stay," Alice replied, speaking very pleasantly.

"Well, I don't believe she wants me," Monty grumbled. He threw himself into a seat beside Alice. "Don't you hate it when people get engaged?" he said. "They're always such bores. Now old Teddy won't be good for anything for—I wonder when they're going to get married. I'll bet it'll be soon." He laughed aloud, harshly, painfully. "I wonder what Bessie Cartwright will think of it!" He darted wildly out of the room, and we heard him springing up the stairs.

"He acts like a lunatic," I said to Alice, but Alice was pursuing another train of thought.

"Who is Bessie Cartwright?" she asked.

"I have n't the remotest idea. Some girl Teddy has been flirting with, probably."

"I know I've heard that name before," Alice insisted.

"You've read it in the society columns."

Alice drew her lower lip between her thumb and forefinger. "I have n't read it in the society columns," she gravely announced.

I was too indifferent to Teddy's past flames to

pursue the inquiry. Suddenly, however, a light broke on my mind. "There must be a New York paper in the house," I said, sitting up erect.

"Don't you think it would be a comfort to let one Sunday in our lives pass without wrestling with those awful sheets?" said Alice.

But I was not to be balked. I looked for an electric button, and a few moments later a New York newspaper was in my hands. I waited till the servant had disappeared from the room. Then I seized the pages and hastily turned them over. At the top of the theatrical page I saw a row of photographs of pretty girls. In the centre was the prettiest, and on the line beneath I read these words: "Bessie Cartwright, of the Blumenthal and Friedheim Company." The girl had big eyes, made the more lustrous by thick pencilling, and hair that fell over the tips of her ears in old-fashioned waves. I studied it for a long time.

"What is it?" said Alice, unable to restrain her impatience any longer.

"It's a photograph of the lady," I replied.

"Then she is an actress!"

"A burlesque actress," I corrected. "I remember now. We saw her last year at Blumenthal and Friedheim's."

"That exquisite creature who sang and danced so beautifully. Oh!"

I gave up the paper, and Alice fastened her eyes on the face. Then she let the sheet drop on the floor. Her face was pale and her eyes were wet with tears.

Mrs. Henderson Meets the Situation 295

"Alice!" I exclaimed reprovingly. "If Mrs. Henderson were to come in here she'd think we had been having a quarrel."

"It's too awful!" Alice went on.

"Now, my dear," I said, "you're simply jumping at conclusions, as you're always doing. There's probably nothing in it." But I saw that my words might just as well have been left unspoken.

We heard a soft step on the stairs and the rustle of drapery; we were becoming familiar with those sounds. "Albert," we heard Mrs. Henderson say, "I wish you would call up Tuxedo for me," and she gave a number. The man went to the telephone in the hall and, by the silence, we knew that Mrs. Henderson was waiting.

"We ought to get out of the way," Alice whispered, but timidity kept her in her seat.

"We'll go as soon as she's sent the message," I replied. "It's probably the doctor."

Alice's look suggested that she knew better. She rose and started to leave the room; but at that instant Mrs. Henderson rapturously exclaimed into the telephone: "Is that you, Nina? It's Flossie. I have some news for you. Letty and Theodore Markoe are engaged. You're the first person I've told." Alice turned to me with an expression of amusement in her eyes. Then she tiptoed back to her seat, making a sign to me to be silent. Her lips moved slowly, without uttering a sound, and I read this message: "She's forgotten all about us."

I did not dare to trust my lips; but in desperate pantomime I indicated that we ought at once to

make our presence felt or we should surely be detected. Alice waved me into obedience.

"It is nice, is n't it? We're all so pleased, and Letty! I wish you could see her. . . . So you've heard about the accident. I supposed you'd hear from Clara Eustace. . . . It has all been dreadful. But it's turned out so well that we're thankful. And, oh! Nina, don't tell a soul, will you? . . . Yes, they're here. Are n't they dears? They're such a comfort. We're going to try to keep them with us for a while. I simply had to let you know, Nina. Good-bye, dear."

We listened apprehensively, expecting Mrs. Henderson to enter the room; instead, she remained at the telephone and asked for a New York number. I threw out both hands in despairing reproach. Alice sat motionless with a look of divine patience in her face. Almost word for word the message to Mrs. Van Zandt was repeated, with the statement emphasised that no one else had been told and the news must be kept secret.

For the first time Alice began to show alarm. She appealed to me, and I made a sign which plainly said: "I warned you!"

Mrs. Henderson called up a second New York number; but the person she asked for was evidently not at home. Then she called Cedarhurst. For a third time she gave her message of confidence, and at the end of her talk she stood at the telephone for a long time. I decided that Albert had probably withdrawn and she was looking up a number in the telephone book. The next call was for New York and in her own voice.

Mrs. Henderson Meets the Situation 297

"Is Miss Balch there?"

A long silence followed.

"Where does she live? Yes, where?" . . .

"Oh, yes. Thank you. Do you know whether she has a telephone number? What did you say? The Washington apartments. Oh, yes. Thank you. I'll look in the book."

For at least ten minutes that poor woman struggled with the telephone. I felt exhausted for her, and yet, somehow, I had an impish desire to applaud her persistence. She was plainly used to achieving what she undertook. At last she was rewarded.

"Oh, dear Miss Balch! Is that you? It's Mrs. Henderson. What's that? Oh, yes. I'm quite well, thank you. This is just to give you a bit of news. You know, I promised to help you when I could, and I am so sorry I have n't had a chance to do anything for you lately. I really have n't been about much. I've been keeping quiet on account of my girl, Letty, you know. You met Letty at the Bentleys', I remember. Well, dear, she's engaged to Theodore Markoe. You know Theodore, of course, and you know all about the Markoes. I wanted you to know first, dear, so that you should have it for yourself. It must get into the newspapers, and I knew that I could rely on your taste. Besides, it's such a pleasure to be able to do even a little thing for you, dear."

Alice lifted both her hands, her eyes big.

At that moment Mrs. Henderson walked from the telephone and hesitated just outside the door. We did not move. Very slowly the rustling began again,

and we heard that soft footstep on the stairs. We did not begin to breathe easily till it died away.

"She ought to have been a general," said Alice. "New York, Tuxedo, and Cedarhurst. By to-night every one will know."

"But why Cedarhurst?"

"Because a lot of the hunting people are there,—friends of Teddy's."

By closing the door we made ourselves feel that we could talk in safety. Alice hesitated, plainly on the defensive and expecting me to speak first.

"Well?" she finally queried.

I sighed.

"It seems to me a very happy arrangement for every one," she went on with an air of challenge. As I remained silent, she said: "Don't you think that Letty will be happy?"

"No!" I replied.

"Why not?" As I took more time to consider the question than her patience would allow, she became more specific: "Don't you think she loves him?"

"I don't know whether she does or not. That consideration won't affect the result. He'll tire of her anyway."

"Ned!" Alice exclaimed, shocked.

"I'll give them a year—to be generous. Then he'll go back to Bessie Cartwright or some one else."

"But he's reformed. He's begun over again."

"There's no such thing as beginning over again. Life is all of a piece."

"Ned, if I believed that, I'd leave you. Letty is going to make a new man of him."

Mrs. Henderson Meets the Situation 299

I uttered an exclamation of impatience.

"Don't you believe a woman can change a man?" Alice asked, with tears in her voice.

"Not a man like Teddy. You can't change the habits of a lifetime."

"Well, I think it's awful of you to talk like that, Ned," said Alice, and I perceived that she was really hurt. I had touched one of the points in which a woman is most proud and sensitive, the influence for good of her sex over Man.

"Then she'll be dreadfully fooled," said Alice, as if taking a grim comfort from Teddy's imperviousness. "That's why she's marrying him." Reading doubt in my face, she went on: "You certainly don't dispute that."

"She may have that conceited notion," I acknowledged, expecting to be rebuked. But Alice was too serious to adopt that method of retaliation. "So few girls escape it! But, in my opinion, she thinks she cares for him."

"Thinks?" Alice repeated, satirically.

"They've persuaded her—the father and mother. They made her fix her attention on Teddy. At first she was repelled, or she thought she was. Then, as she realised how necessary the marriage was, the idea grew more——"

"Hateful," Alice interposed.

"Possibly. But there is n't such a wide difference between hate and love, you know. At any rate, she became used to the idea of associating Teddy with herself and the experiences of last night did the rest of the work."

“If he ’s kind to her, she ’ll make a good, loving wife,” Alice stoutly exclaimed, but with tears in her eyes, and I had not the heart to pursue the discussion. It was painful to think of any woman being grateful for mere kindness on the part of her husband.

CHAPTER XXI

TEDDY MAKES ANOTHER APPEAL

A LICE and I seized the chance to escape to our apartment, and we both had a little nap. When we went down-stairs again we found Monty drinking tea with Mrs. Henderson. The boy explained that he had decided not to go to town after all, and Mrs. Henderson announced that Letty would come down to dinner, and that after dinner we were all to be admitted into the room of the invalid. She spoke in the tone employed by kind women in dealing with children about to be rewarded for good behaviour. It was pathetic to see her determination to be kind to every one.

At seven o'clock Letty appeared, looking—I honestly believe that I do not exaggerate—like a celestial presence. She wore a simple white muslin gown and her face was very pale; her eyes shone as I have seen eyes shine in pictures of Joan of Arc. I saw Monty look at her as if he were meeting her for the first time. He seemed bewildered, and he walked beside the girl to the dinner-table like one in a dream; during the whole meal, discouraged possibly by Mr. Henderson's expansive utterances, he did not make one flippant remark.

It was announced that coffee would be served in

Teddy's bedroom, and we went there straight from the table. Teddy, in a padded robe of wine-coloured silk that made him look like a sick schoolboy, lay propped and bandaged among the pillows. Those of his features that we could perceive gave suggestions of a deathly pallour. And yet I had never seen him look so attractive. Perhaps it was his faint, slow smile that made him pathetic, perhaps the little break in his voice. He had plainly passed through an ordeal terrible even to his hardened spirit. In response to our congratulations, he squeezed our hands, and he tried to meet Monty's rather forced railleries with patient good-humour. If, in the innermost recesses of my mind, I had been base enough to wonder whether he had deliberately taken advantage of his condition to press his suit with Letty, I repented, and I was glad when, after a quarter of an hour, we all started to leave the room. As I was about to step into the hall, Mrs. Henderson touched me lightly on the arm.

"Theodore would like to speak to you," she whispered.

I turned back, and the door closed on the others, leaving me alone with the invalid. With his eyes he motioned me to come toward him. He moved slightly so that I could sit beside him on the bed.

"I want to ask a favour," he said in a hoarse voice. "You and your wife. I want you to stay here with my girl for a little while—just a few days. Will you?"

It was so hard for him to speak that, in conscience, I could not have opposed his request; but I felt my

Teddy Makes Another Appeal 303

spirits going down at the thought of being cut off from escape with Alice the next day.

"I'll speak to my wife," I said. "I think that she would be——"

"You can do your work here, can't you?" Teddy whispered.

"Oh, yes," I replied, and inwardly I groaned at the thought of forcing myself to write in those strange surroundings. At that moment I loved our little apartment as I had never loved it before.

"Your wife's a brick," Teddy went on. "She's been good to my girl. And I'm going to be—I'm going to be a different man."

I pressed his hand, as men on the stage do with each other in times of emotion. I felt silly and ashamed. I spoke up in a strong, manly voice, in the cheery tone that I should think invalids would hate:

"Oh, you're going to be all right in a day or two. Then you won't want us around. We'll simply be in the way."

In this observation Teddy did not seem interested. Again I had the sense that he so often inspired in me of being silently rebuked.

"The great thing is not to let that mother and father of hers bore her to death," Teddy went on, his voice growing more raucous. "They can't let her alone one minute in the day. And it will be specially hard for her here for the next few days."

This remark took all the pathos out of our interview. I rose slowly. "I'll speak to my wife," I said, and Teddy replied: "Letty will tell me what she says." Then I left the room.

As soon as I could get a word with Alice, I rehearsed the interview. She listened patiently till I had given all the details. Then she said: "Letty told me while you were in there with him, and she implored me to stay till the middle of the week. I don't see how we can desert her."

As there were people near by, I could not explode.

"But how about the apartment?" I said. "There's no knowing what Mary will do."

Alice had a reply ready: "To-morrow she'll wash and on Tuesday she'll do her ironing. She'll be glad that we're out of the way. And she'll have a beautiful time all day long drinking tea strong enough to kill her."

"Tea!" I sceptically exclaimed.

"And on Wednesday we'll be back there. We'll take an early train. Meanwhile I'll telephone her twice a day. You know she often runs out to the drug-store to answer telephone calls for us."

"If you decide to stay," I said with authority, "I will go up to town to-morrow and come down in the afternoon."

"All right, Ned, dear," Alice sweetly replied. "That will be very nice. Then you can bring the play down and get some work done."

The reference to the play made me long to attack it again. It seemed as if I had last worked on it in another life. While Alice was engaged with Letty and while Monty and Mrs. Henderson were desecrating the Sabbath by playing cribbage, I stole upstairs and began to pace the floor and to plan scenes. The afternoon nap had refreshed me and given my

Teddy Makes Another Appeal 305

mind an activity unwonted at that time of the evening. When Alice came up, I had written several pages.

"Now you won't sleep all night," she said, "and you needed the rest after last night."

I was too cheerful in the consciousness of work accomplished to pursue an argument. Those two scenes contained the best speeches I had yet been able to devise for Lily Valentine.

"Go down-stairs and eat something," Alice commanded. "That absurd Monty is feasting on some chicken salad and milk. He is just getting round to be like himself again."

"By the way," I said, "what's the matter with Monty?"

Alice smiled. "So you've noticed. He is only just realising Letty's value—now that she's out of the market. I've seen that sort of thing happen dozens of times. It's just like men to appreciate what they can't get."

CHAPTER XXII

MONTY GROWS REMINISCENT

I FOUND Monty in front of the fireplace in the big living-room, his feet on the fender and a plate of chicken salad and a big glass pitcher of creamy milk on a little table by his side. In his lap lay the New York newspaper that Alice and I had been looking at, and from the upper page gleamed the lustrous eyes of Bessie Cartwright.

Monty held up the paper and pointed to the photograph. "Say!" he exclaimed. "Ain't she a peach?"

"She's a very pretty girl," I replied, feeling eighty years old. I wondered if, as a boy, I ever gave my elders the uncomfortable feeling with which Monty invariably inspired me.

"Which do you think is the prettier, Bessie Cartwright or Letty Henderson?"

"They're rather different types, are n't they?"

"Well, rather!" Monty's tone made me long to hurl him out of the window. "But she's an awful nice little girl, Bessie is, quiet as a mouse until she gets a little too much champagne into her."

Of course, I ought to have rebuked him then and there and silenced him; I believe I should have made some stinging remark if he had not rushed to the electric bell and summoned a servant.

"You want something to drink, of course," he said. "I beg your pardon. I suppose I ought to take Teddy's place while nobody else is around. Have a high-ball, won't you?"

When the servant came I asked for some cold chicken and beer, and for a half-hour Monty and I munched together. "I have to eat five times a day by the doctor's orders," the boy genially remarked, glancing at his empty plate and then helping himself to my chicken. "Just now I'm two meals behind. But I'll eat again before I go to bed."

"It's pretty nearly bedtime now, is n't it?" I said.

"Oh, I never go to bed before one or two o'clock. I intend to sit here and read and smoke." He sank back lazily, and between his outstretched legs he drew a chair toward him and rested his feet on it. "I often drink five quarts of milk a day," he said, in the tone of one announcing a brilliant achievement. As I made no comment, Monty went on: "If I did n't drink milk, I'd be down in the ground by this time. I can't stand racketing as most fellows do. Now there's Teddy, he actually grows fat on it. I've known him to sit up for three nights in succession playing bridge without once hitting the bed. And, gee! but Teddy's game. At Billy Fiske's one night—you know about Billy Fiske's, of course; the big gambling-house that they've closed up lately—well, Teddy started in one night to play for big stakes. At three o'clock in the morning he was nearly eighty thousand dollars behind the game. We tried to drag him away from the tables; but he would n't budge.

He stuck to that table till eleven o'clock the next morning."

"How much had he lost by that time?" I said, trying not to look incredulous.

Monty jumped up in his seat, letting his legs drop to the floor. "He was thirty thousand dollars to the good," he replied in a loud voice.

I glanced apprehensively toward the hall.

"Oh, they've all gone to bed," said Monty, reassuringly; but I nevertheless took the precaution to close the door.

"Well, I was scared blue that time," Monty went on, putting his feet back on the chair. "I knew that he would n't leave that table till his luck turned or he'd lost everything he had. And then I knew what would happen. He'd have blown his brains out," the boy concluded in an awe-inspiring tone.

I came near making a remark out of harmony with the impressiveness of the moment.

"Well, lucky at cards!" Monty suddenly burst into a laugh. "But Teddy seems to be lucky at everything."

"Except automobiling."

"Oh, that's nothing. I've seen him laid out on the polo-field dozens of times. You can't kill Teddy *that* way. But I never thought he'd settle down. I thought Bessie Cartwright had him cinched. But I guess that old battle-axe, Mrs. Henderson, smashed that little affair all right. My! but she's keen. What she does n't know!"

I am uncertain whether it was virtue or the necessity of seeming virtuous at the moment that made

me rise and leave the room. "I'm going to take an early train," I said, as a pretext.

"Then I'll go up with you," Monty replied, unconscious of being snubbed.

Alice was asleep, and for a long time I sat in the dressing-room, beside the open window, taking deep draughts of the cold air and inviting pneumonia. In the moonlight stretched the farm-buildings, and between the trees I could catch glimpses of the winding white road. I felt a painful disgust with life. What did it mean, I kept asking myself, to be decent? Was it merely a matter of chance, of environment, of prejudice? Was there no such thing as honour in the nature of the average man? Did the possession of wealth mean that a man was made free to follow his own inclinations, no matter what the cost might be to others? Were those men who kept straight merely restrained by circumstances? Would all men with opportunities for doing as they pleased use them as Teddy Markoe did? Then I felt ashamed of my moralisings and, yawning, I closed the window. The best I could do was not to interfere, even in imagination, with the affairs of other people. So I decided the most reasonable course was not to say anything to Alice about Bessie Cartwright.

The next morning Monty, in spite of his engagement with me, did not appear at breakfast, and I started off to town alone. On reaching the apartment I found Mary busily engaged with the washing. She greeted me with an enthusiasm that made me think she had been lonely. The apartment looked marvellously fresh, and the steam-heated air con-

veyed no suggestion of the scene Mary had given us a week before. I dishonestly explained that Alice would not return till the next day, possibly till Wednesday morning, and Mary looked so ugly that I hastened to explain that the chances were in favour of Alice's coming soon after luncheon on Tuesday. "But if we don't get here till evening," I said, "you need n't wait for us."

"Shall I have dinner ready, sir?" Mary asked, and I thought I perceived a gleam of suspicion in her eye.

"Don't unless I telephone, Mary," I replied, and I turned away to avoid further scrutiny.

Mary wiped her hands in her apron. "There's a lady wanted ye on the telephone this mornin'," she said, giving me a severe look. "She told me to tell you to call her up."

"Me? Not Mrs. Foster?"

"No, you, sir," Mary replied, with sternness in her voice and manner. "'T is you the lady wants." She went to the closet and from a teacup she took out a soiled piece of newspaper.

I read the number and slipped the paper in my pocket. It must be Lily Valentine, I reflected, and I thrilled with alarm at the thought. What further restrictions was she going to impose on me? "All right, Mary," I said cheerfully, and, hurrying to the study, I seized the manuscript sheets of the play, thrust them into my pocket, and dashed to the hall-door.

"Will yer be back for lunch, sir?" Mary called out.

I stopped long enough to explain that I should lunch uptown, and then I closed the door between us. As

I ran down the stairs I could see Mary peering down over the bannister. From the street I looked up at the apartment, to take a farewell glance, and, to my astonishment, from one of the front windows I was again greeted with a vision of those Irish features, which instantly vanished.

CHAPTER XXIII

OUR PLAY MARCHES

AT the drug-store I called up the number on the slip of paper, and presently I was talking with Lily Valentine.

"Oh, Mr. Dramatist, I've been waiting round for you for nearly two hours. Something terrible has happened and you must come up here at once. Can't you take me out to luncheon? Then we sha'n't be interrupted. We'll go to some quiet place. The missus won't object, will she? Then do come quick. Come in a cab. I'll be waiting for you."

For economy I walked to Sixth Avenue, and I rode to the neighbourhood of Miss Valentine's house in a street-car. Then I secured a cab and drove up with a flourish. As the cab trembled in front of the house Miss Valentine came tearing down the steps.

"Let's go to Werner's on Broadway. There's no one there at this time," she said, and she gave instructions to the driver. I helped her into the vehicle and sat beside her. "I suppose you think I'm crazy; but when I want to do a thing I must do it right off. But you are a dear, to come up so quickly. I suppose you were glad to get away from the lovers, were n't you? Holbrook has put his foot

down, and he says we can't wait till you've finished your piece. He says we must put something into rehearsal at once, and he has a melodrama that he wants me to try. A melodrama! Think of it. Is n't it awful? Oh, you need n't laugh! I'm heart-broken, really!" Two little tears trembled at the corner of Lily Valentine's eyes. "People think I have a beautiful time," the actress resumed after a brief interval of pouting. "They have no idea of the *ennuis* I'm obliged to endure. I shall simply die if I have to go into that melodrama."

"Suppose we wait till we reach the restaurant," I suggested. "Then we can discuss the situation quietly."

Miss Valentine maintained a resentful silence till we had settled ourselves at the table. "Now get me a cocktail and order something that won't make me fat. Some oysters and some—some—well, a bird. Quail, that's what I want—quail. Oh, we must have a high-ball with the lunch. There! How does that suit you?" She leaned forward till her face nearly touched mine, and she rested both hands on the edge of the table. "You really must finish that play this week," she announced.

"Impossible!" I exclaimed.

"Nothing is impossible. Nothing, nothing, nothing! People used to think my career was impossible,—my family, for instance. But I knew better. They said I could n't act. So did the critics at first. But I knew I could learn. And I'm learning. Now how much have you done? Tell me exactly."

While I explained, she listened, her blazing eyes

seeming to burn into my face. "Where is the manuscript of the first act?" she said.

"In my pocket."

"Produce it and read it to me."

Instinctively I glanced over the room, shining with mirrors and linen. "Never mind those people. Who cares for the *canaille*?"

"But, Miss Valentine!" I protested.

"Read!" she commanded.

There was nothing to do but obey. Her eyes kept moving excitedly. She was evidently thinking of the way the scenes would work out on the stage. When I had finished she said, in a voice of concession:

"Too talky, but good curtain." In her face appeared a look of tragic apprehension. "Do you think you can live up to that act? The play must go up, up, up to the climax! And then, you must gather all the threads you leave at the close of the third act, wind them together tightly at the close, and send the people to their nice, deadly, *bourgeois* homes perfectly happy. And, of course," she added warningly, "you're going to change that entrance. You can do that right here, after we eat."

The appearance of the waiter interrupted our talk about business. "I'm ravenously hungry," said Miss Valentine. "I had so many things to do, I forgot to take breakfast."

"You'll kill yourself if you don't look out," I remonstrated. I noticed that her face had an alabaster pallor.

"Well, now let's eat and keep up our strength. We'll need it during the next few weeks. On Sunday

night we leave for Scranton, and we play Pennsylvania towns for three nights. Then we go to New York State, and we play places there like Syracuse and Utica until the end of the week. And then, oh, blessed relief! We come to Harlem for a week. Now my idea is to put the piece into rehearsal while we're in Harlem."

"And after Harlem, what?" I asked.

"Ugh! We make an awful jump—'way out to Dayton, Ohio. Oh, those booking-people will simply drive me to drink! Another week of one-night stands. But after that week, there'll be open time in New York and we'll have a chance to get it. Hurrah!" Miss Valentine threw her napkin into the air, and then became overwhelmed with confusion, her pale face growing crimson. She pressed the napkin against her mouth and she went on in a muffled voice: "Now, Ohio will give us a chance to try the piece on the dog. There'll be a new dog every night. Of course, you'll see a lot of things that you'll want to change."

"And I can make the changes on the train," I said, in gentle reproach.

The actress laughed with hysterical glee. "You'll learn for the first time in your life what real work is. But, honest, you'll have a good deal of time to yourself. Some of the jumps won't be more than three or four hours at the most, and when we have a long jump we'll make it at night. So then you'll have a whole day for writing, except," she added, "the time you give to rehearsing at the theatre. During the day-jumps we can rehearse on the train. I just love

that. It makes me forget about travelling, and it's so nice to do two things at once."

I reflected that if many plays were produced under such conditions it was not surprising that so few had any merit.

"Ah, I know what you're thinking of!" Miss Valentine exclaimed with startling insight. "You authors are all alike. You think you can't write unless you're living in luxurious ease. That's why it takes most authors such a long time to get anything done. Talk about lazy actors! We're busy bees compared with you Sybarites! But now, to get back to business. Can you let me have the whole manuscript in a week?"

"I cannot."

"You mean you won't!" Miss Valentine exclaimed.

"Now it's to my interest to get that play done as fast as I can," I resumed, and I tried to keep my voice from sounding angry. "But if you drive me too hard I shall get nervous and excited about it and the result will be, I feel certain, very unsatisfactory to you."

Once more Miss Valentine's eyes filled with tears.

"Well, you need n't be so cross with me."

"I don't mean to be cross, my dear Miss Valentine. Now, to-night I'm going back to Markoe's place to stay for——"

Miss Valentine's face became blank. "You're going to try to work down there with all those drones around you! Oh, it's all up with that play! It's all up with that play! I might as well make up my mind to cast the melodrama at once."

"I think I can protect myself from the influence of the drones," I loftily remarked.

"But it's deadly—having those people around. It's all right when you want to be amused. Oh, if I had to be with them every day of my life, I should—well, I'd run away with the coachman! I have n't any respect for the girl who would n't. Now, that little Teddy—he positively makes me creep. And after the way he's treated Bessie Cartwright! But she's lucky to get rid of him. If you could hear the way she used to ridicule him behind his back.

"Bessie Cartwright!" I repeated, aghast. "Do *you* know her?"

Miss Valentine flushed. "Of course I do," she replied, with an air of bravado. "She's a very jolly girl. I know everybody." She lifted her eyebrows and drew her lips together. "Teddy Markoe used to be perfectly mad over her."

For a long time we ate in silence. Somehow the talk about Bessie Cartwright had embarrassed us both. At last Miss Valentine raised her eyes and looked me square in the face. "Mind you, I don't believe all those stories they tell about Bessie. They say the most awful things about girls on the stage. Besides, my experience has taught me to be very broad about such matters."

I had a recurrence of the impulse which this girl often gave me to laugh aloud. And yet in her worldliness there was pathos too. She looked so young and delicate for one so wise.

"Now about the second act," Miss Valentine abruptly resumed. "You have that here too, have n't you?"

"But it's in no condition to be read aloud," I

replied. "The first act shaped itself; but the second act must be gone over."

"Oh, that's always the way!" the girl groaned. "There's Walter Hart. His first acts are great. And then there's no knowing whether he'll keep up or go to smash. However—" She assumed an expression of deep seriousness. "I suppose I can't blame you for being like the rest of them." Then she smiled roguishly and, as she sipped her coffee, she turned her soulful eyes on me. "You think I'm awfully difficult, don't you? Well, I'm not nearly as bad as some actresses that you're likely to meet before you end your career. Now we'll drive down to my house, and while I'm changing my gown—I'm going to some teas later on—I'll let you make yourself comfortable in the library and retouch that first act. You must tighten up some of those speeches, by the way. They're not snappy enough. But we can fix that all right. Well, we'll keep the cab and, from my house, we'll drive down to the typewriter's. I know some nice girls that make a specialty of typewriting plays, and we'll have the first act done right off. I'll have duplicate copies made and one of them will go in the mail to you to-night—with the manuscript."

"But why this feverish haste?" I asked.

"Because I must have something to show Holbrook at the theatre to-night—something to prove that you're actually at work. I think he'll like that first act. I shall use it to shoo off the melodrama."

A few minutes later I sat alone in Miss Valentine's library bending over the manuscript. I made the changes in the entrance and ran over the whole dia-

logue, finding many speeches that could be condensed or omitted altogether. When the actress returned she nodded her approval.

"Finished? Well, you've been a very good boy. Don't show it to me now. I can get it all much better by reading the manuscript. Oh, the manuscripts I've read since I've been a star! If I lose my eyesight I'm going to make the Dramatists' Club support me for the rest of my life."

We returned to the cab and swept down the street toward Broadway, bumping over the tracks in Sixth Avenue. "Do you know," Miss Valentine cried out in the noise, "I feel as if I had known you for years and years!"

"That drive down Broadway drew us rather closely together," I foolishly remarked.

"Well, it will be all right if you don't get the big head!" Miss Valentine exclaimed, with the air of rebuking me. "So many nice men become perfectly hateful after they've had a success with a play. And the way they treat the actors!"

At the typewriter's the entrance of the actress made a sensation. The girls all gathered around her, smiling into her face and studying her clothes. Miss Valentine gave her instructions with the air of one used to being obeyed, and back we went into the cab.

"You've been such a nice boy to-day, that I'll take you down to the ferry."

When I started to protest, she cut me short. "Now let's not argue. That's so fatiguing, and I'm going to be awfully bored at those teas. You've been a dear about giving me so much time and being so

patient." Here she rested her hand on my arm. "But we are going to have a good play, are n't we? And you won't let Society keep you from working. Promise me, won't you, please?"

"I'll promise to have the second act in your hands this week," I replied. "And, if I get an inspiration, perhaps the third too," I recklessly added.

"Oh, I'll pray for you every night!" the actress exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXIV

AN UNCONVENTIONAL MEETING

AS I was searching for change to pay for my ferry ticket, a breath panted behind me.

"Oh, Mr. Foster! Do pay for me too."

I looked around and there stood Mrs. Eustace.

"I never have any change in my purse, and I do hate this beastly ferry so. You're going down to Teddy's again, I know. I've been talking with Letty's mother over the telephone. She implored me to come down to talk over the wedding-plans. Is n't it exciting?" Without letting me reply, Mrs. Eustace continued: "But it's the only decent thing I've known Teddy Markoe to do. If he had n't engaged himself yesterday I'd never have spoken to him again."

"They seem very much in love," I said; not because I thought so, but because it sounded correct.

Mrs. Eustace sniffed. "It's a blessing all round. The Hendersons have been on everybody's mind for years. It's been positively tragic the way Flossie Henderson has been holding on. Now, of course, Teddy will be glad to give her and that precious husband of hers a good income to keep out of the way. Perhaps they'll go abroad and live."

Having dismissed them, Mrs. Eustace returned to

her own affairs. "You were kind and discreet yesterday," she said. "I'm glad to have a chance to thank you. Of course I know you have n't spoken to any one about the matter.

"Oh, no," I carelessly replied.

"It was perfectly simple," Mrs. Eustace resumed. "There's no reason in the world why I should n't tell you, though, of course, one hates to have one's affairs discussed, and it's not like me to go about discussing them. That ex-husband of mine has been derelict about my alimony. Well, I needed the money and I asked Mr. Cosgrave to take my diamonds and get it for me. He had n't had a chance to explain the sordid details; but he sent me the money by messenger yesterday. It would have been rather horrid if that paper had fallen into any other hands than yours. People are so odious."

I tried to maintain an air of composure, but I felt my face growing hot. Mrs. Eustace's serenity made me appear like the one who had uttered the deceit. She had turned toward me with an air of frank confidence; but I could not meet her eye.

At the Long Island station there was great confusion: already the crowds had begun to come from the city. When we had taken our seats in the Pullman, Mrs. Eustace threw back her coat, revealing a pretty white lace waist with large pearl buttons. Men were quickly passing along the narrow aisle in search of their seats. One of them, a tall, athletic figure with light hair, a handsome face, and wearing a long automobile coat, looked at Mrs. Eustace, flushed a deep crimson, and exclaimed:

An Unconventional Meeting 323

"Why, Sissy!"

Mrs. Eustace had fixed her eyes on him. "Well, Fritz! How are you?"

"Oh, I'm all right," Fritz replied cheerfully, but with evident embarrassment. "I've never seen *you* looking so well."

"I'm not well, Fritz!" Mrs. Eustace exclaimed in a pathetic voice.

"What's the matter, Sissy?"

"I've been making a fool of myself, as usual, that's all." The manner in which Mrs. Eustace spoke suggested a long series of similar talks in the past, and the impression was confirmed by the glad laugh with which the words were greeted. "What have *you* been doing?"

"I'm a slave. From morning till this time in the afternoon, Sissy. No more days off! Booze, cigarettes—all cut out. Things are going great, too. We've nearly doubled the business in the past year and a half."

"Oh, how splendid!" Mrs. Eustace spoke with feverish enthusiasm.

Fritz looked down at her, smiling brightly.

"Where are you going now?" said Mrs. Eustace in a tone almost wistful.

"To the Goddard's, to their place in Tillbury. I've been staying there since Thursday."

Mrs. Eustace thrust out her lips as a woman does when she is drawing a veil over her face. "Is Edith at home now?"

"Oh, yes. She's been at home all winter."

"She usually goes South," Mrs. Eustace remarked in a faint voice.

Fritz lifted his eyebrows. "I have n't heard her speak of going. None of them have mentioned it."

Mrs. Eustace looked inquiringly at an empty seat near us. "Are you in this car?" she asked.

Fritz shook his head, and I noticed how sincere his eyes were. "Frank Goddard must be in the smoker. I'm looking for him."

Mrs. Eustace sighed in acceptance of the statement. "Where are you living now?" she asked.

"Same place—the Wentworth Apartments. They keep me comfortable."

He plainly wished to break away; but he waited for her to give the signal. She held out her hand with undisguised reluctance. He held it firmly and looked into her eyes.

"Have you got everything you want, Sissy?" he asked.

"Everything, thank you."

"Well, if you have n't, you can write, you know."

She turned away with a plaintive smile. "Good-bye, Fritz," she said, hardly above a whisper, and, with a quick glance at that empty seat, he bolted towards the door.

Mrs. Eustace watched him till he disappeared. "That's my ex-husband," she said. "To think that we should meet like this! Ever since I came back from Sioux Falls I've expected this meeting, and I've been preparing for it. And now I've done exactly the reverse of what I'd planned to do! But I never, never thought he'd have the courage to speak to me. 'Pon my word, I was so flabbergasted!" Mrs. Eustace looked swiftly about, apparently in search of

acquaintances. Then she seemed relieved. "He *is* a good sort, after all, poor Fritz! He was very decent and fine about the whole miserable matter, and while I was out in that horrible hole in South Dakota, he used to write me the sweetest letters. He was so different from Sibyl Lathrop's husband—the beast! Whenever Sibyl and I went out for a walk, two detectives used to stalk after us. And once, when a man she had known in New York happened to be passing through on business and sent up his card, Sibyl nearly fainted away with fright."

The train had just started, and Mrs. Eustace settled herself comfortably. "Well, I'm glad the Goddards are kind to him!" She drew up her shoulders in a long exhalation. "But Edith Goddard is a cat if there ever was one."

During the rest of our little journey Mrs. Eustace was abstracted, replying to my remarks as if she hardly understood them. As we started to leave the train, she looked about nervously and spoke in a loud voice, and with a sudden assumption of a marked English accent which I had occasionally observed in her speech. "I suppose there'll be a motor to meet us."

On the platform of the station she scanned the men leaving the train. Then she swiftly followed me toward the automobile which I had recognised as belonging to Teddy.

"It's a curious thing," she remarked, ignoring the chauffeur, and plainly continuing a train of thought,—"association. The ties it creates, good and bad; but I don't suppose they can be all good. I suppose

you two young people are very happy in your honeymooning," she went on, dropping the English accent.

"Well, we feel like an old married couple!" I said with a laugh.

"Old!" Mrs. Eustace derisively echoed. "I feel as if I had lived a million years. And if I were to live a million more," she announced in a matter-of-fact tone utterly at variance with her manner of a few moments before, "I'd be just as big a fool."

As we approached the house, Alice was standing on the steps of the porch. In her face I thought I could read both anxiety and relief. We went upstairs together and at the first landing Alice turned into the long corridor.

"They've changed our rooms," she whispered, and I followed. When we had closed the door behind us, Alice exclaimed: "Well, I've had the strangest day. From the time you left, flowers and letters have been pouring in, and the telephone-bell has been ringing all day long. Letty has been nearly crazy with excitement. And what do you think? They're planning to have the wedding within a month."

"Well, why not?" I surveyed the big room, filled with Colonial furniture, and I glanced into the bedroom adjoining. "They're making us comfortable all right," I added.

"They're afraid we'll go," Alice replied. "They're determined to keep us here."

I laughed aloud. "My dear, as a couple we must be charming. Or is it you they're after?"

"We make distraction for Letty," Alice laconically replied.

"I did n't know that an engaged girl required distraction."

"Oh, it is very mysterious," Alice went on, finding me unsympathetic. "But Monty has been a great comfort. He takes the whole business as the greatest joke in the world. He has kept Letty laughing all day long."

"And what's Teddy been doing?"

"He's been in his room most of the time."

"Alone?"

Alice smiled. "Mrs. Henderson has kept him from being lonely."

I gave Alice a rapid account of my day's doings.

"They know here that you're going to be awfully busy, Ned," said Alice, "and they won't mind a bit if you keep yourself shut up most of the time."

I went down to dinner determined to be cheerful. Teddy, bruised but unbandaged, and looking almost handsome in his pallor, appeared at the table and took the seat that Henderson had been occupying; it was announced that Mr. Henderson's business had detained him in town. Mrs. Henderson sat opposite the boy, wearing one of the most *ingénue* frocks, and Letty was at Teddy's right, flushed, bright-eyed, and, I thought, rather scared. Mrs. Eustace, in her rose-coloured dinner dress, reminded me of a great peony: without being really large she, somehow, suggested superabundance. As we bent over the oysters, some one, I think it was Mrs. Henderson, made an inquiry about Cosgrave, and in a flash came a reply from Mrs. Eustace that closed the subject. "I don't know anything about him."

Then Monty piped up: "Gee, I wish we could have Dick Ferris down here. We need another hand at Bridge. I don't suppose we can count on you, Foster?"

"Perhaps you can get Dick," Mrs. Eustace carelessly replied. "Why not call him up on the 'phone?"

"Oh, he's always dining out somewhere," said Monty, with a bored air.

Nothing further was said about Ferris; but, after dinner, while we were drinking coffee in front of the fireplace in the living-room, I heard Monty at the telephone. A few moments later he came in and explained that as Ferris was not at home, he had left a message.

The incident seemed casual and insignificant enough; but it struck me as odd that Monty should care whether Ferris came or not. Besides, as I went up-stairs, I noticed that I left behind people enough to make up a game of bridge. I soon forgot the episode, however, in the thought of the work I had before me. There was no time to be lost in pacing the floor or in idly contemplating my task. With an effort, I got my pen under way and, between intervals of repose, I kept it busy till Alice came up. She expressed astonishment at finding me still awake.

"It's past twelve o'clock," she said.

"What have you been doing?" I asked.

"We played Bridge till eleven."

"For money?"

"Small stakes, dear. Hardly——"

"How much did you lose?"

"I won seven dollars."

An Unconventional Meeting 329

I frowned. "It's really awful, this business." I felt that I ought to make the remark; though I was too sleepy to feel any moral qualms.

Alice lifted her eyebrows. "But every one does it," she said, making the argument with which women always believe themselves triumphant.

"That makes it all the worse. I wish you'd stop it, dear."

"But, Ned, how can I without seeming hateful? They positively will not play without stakes. Monty was vexed as it was, because——"

"Oh, damn Monty!"

"They'll hear you, Ned, if you are n't careful."

"I supposed they'd all gone to bed."

"All but Letty and Monty."

"Letty and Monty!" I exclaimed. "Where are they?"

"I left them out on the porch. It's very mild out there, and the moon is shining. They're waiting for Mr. Ferris. He's coming on the late train."

CHAPTER XXV

WE FINISH OUR TASK

THE next morning Alice announced that she was going to town. "You won't mind, dear, will you?" she said.

"What for?" I said severely.

"Well, for two reasons," Alice hesitated, her forefinger at her lips.

"One is to confer with Mary. What's the other?" Alice straightened herself up.

"To keep an appointment with Mr. Cosgrave."

"Ah!" I breathed hard. "Does Mrs. Eustace know of that appointment?"

"She's possibly forgotten it. She forgets everything."

"You know I've been opposed to the portrait all along."

"But he's done so much work on it, dear."

I waved both hands. "How many more sittings?"

"I'll make this the last one, Ned," said Alice in a tone of concession.

An obstacle suddenly occurred to me. "Who will go to the studio with you?"

"I'll take Mary," Alice promptly replied.

To keep from yielding to loneliness I worked with desperation. At two o'clock I ate my solitary meal

with the comforting sense that I had accomplished three times as much as I could have done at home. After eating, I smoked for an hour, still thinking of the play and the rewards it might bring. Then I attacked it a second time, resolved to make a record. It was five o'clock when Alice appeared, and, at sight of her, I threw my arms around her neck and exclaimed: "I'm in the fourth act. It's coming on great! Everything for Lily Valentine. Hurrah for the house in the country!"

Alice was laughing and trying to disengage herself. "Mrs. Van Zandt will think you're crazy!" she said.

I stepped back and saw Mrs. Van Zandt's slight figure in the dim light of the hall. "I beg your pardon," I said.

Mrs. Van Zandt came in smiling radiantly. "Don't. It makes me feel young again."

We shook hands and I felt an absurd desire to embrace her too. At the moment, I loved everybody.

"You certainly must have that house in the country," she said quizzically. "The country air just suits you. By the way, when you finish your visit here, why can't you two children come to us at Tuxedo? I'm just going down for a month."

"But if things go well," Alice interposed with a glance at me, "Ned won't be near New York after a little. He'll have to be on the road, looking after his play."

Mrs. Van Zandt rested her hand on Alice's arm. "Then you must come, my dear, and keep me company while he's away. How is that?" she asked, looking up at me,

"Well, if she does n't come along too," I said, and I suppose my voice sounded wistful. I had a vision of lonely hotels, ghastly night-trains.

"I had to come down and see Letty," said Mrs. Van Zandt. "It was such a surprise. Do you know, I never even thought of such a thing, though I suspected of course, Madam had her eye on Teddy." She lowered her voice. "But Madam has had her eye on so many." Then her voice sank into a deep whisper. "We all thought she was fond of Monty, and we've been inviting them to our dinner-parties for two winters, and putting them together."

"But Monty could n't see it that way," I ventured to remark.

"Apparently not," Mrs. Van Zandt replied, with a little bird-like flutter.

When she had left the room, I returned to Alice. "Oh, I've had such a day!" Alice exclaimed.

"Did you go to Cosgrave's?"

Alice curtseyed. "With Mrs. Van Zandt. I met her at the station. She was just coming out here. I explained everything."

"Everything!" I gasped.

"I mean about how you felt," Alice innocently replied. "It appears that most awful stories are going round about Cosgrave. He never pays his bills, and he——"

"And Mrs. Van Zandt encouraged you to go there, did she?"

"She said I might as well let him finish the portrait, and there was no use in antagonising him."

I laughed scornfully. "Antagonising him! Then it's over?"

"Yes, dear Ned, it's over." said Alice, flatly. She went on with more spirit. "We went home and Mary prepared a nice luncheon for us, and she said she was n't lonely a bit, and we could stay as long as we liked." She put her arms on both my shoulders. "So let's stay till the play is done."

That is exactly what we did, and I look back on our week at Teddy Markoe's with some astonishment. It may have been the place, it may have been Lily Valentine's eagerness, it may have been the combination of circumstances, or it may have been chance alone; but by the following Monday morning I had reached the end of the play. Each day I sent "copy" to the stenographer in New York, and, by the time we were ready to leave, the first three acts were typewritten. Meanwhile Alice had protected me from the merrymaking that had gone on under the roof.

We found Mary in the apartment with such a look of conscious innocence in her naturally indignant face that I at once became suspicious. But Alice, after a quiet glance over the rooms, assured me that all was well. For the next few days we saw almost no one, and it was a relief to be free to work. Even Mary seemed inspired with the importance of the time, and treated me with respect. She plainly approved of my being shut up in the house all day. Though I had come to an end of the play, I found I had only laid a foundation for future work. Scenes had to be re-written or transposed, or omitted altogether to make room for new scenes; many of the speeches that

had written themselves so easily were found to be verbose and ineffective. Alice and I went over the play act by act, scene by scene, line by line, till we began to hate it, and I thought ruefully of the typewriter's bills. By the following Saturday night we received a clean copy of the play and we decided not to look at it.

"Let us take a day of rest," said Alice; and I gladly agreed. On Sunday morning a message summoned me from bed to the telephone. I took the number with the promise that I should call it up in half an hour.

"Lily Valentine!" I called out to Alice. "She must have come in by the night train."

Over the telephone Lily Valentine's voice rang out sharply. I could almost have anticipated the words. "Oh, if it is n't good, I'll kill you! Come up as soon as you can possibly get here. Take the Elevated and walk across town."

On my return to the apartment, Alice was running over the first act. "It's come out splendidly, Ned. It seems so clean and finished."

"No play is ever finished," I grunted, determined not to be hopeful.

Without stopping to take breakfast, we read in silence, Alice keeping one act ahead of me. The stenographer had done a good job. When I finished reading, Alice was in tears.

"Silly!" I exclaimed; but there were tears in my eyes too. I hate to see Alice crying.

"If she does n't like it!" Alice whispered.

"Well, if *you* like it!" I said, and then we had a

moment of such rapture that I felt repaid for all my work. "What difference does it make whether she likes it or not?" I said.

Lily Valentine did like it—with reservations.

"Oh, if I'm mistaken about it, I'll never rely on my own judgment again," the actress said, when I had finished reading. She shook her fist at me. "Oh, you man! If you've fooled me. It may be all in your reading,—not that you're such a great reader, you've missed point after point,—but you make me believe in it. Now I'll get Holbrook to wire all the people to-day and we'll read it aloud to them to-morrow. Mind you! I don't say I'll put it on. Holbrook must be consulted."

She was tremulous with excitement, and she began to cough violently. I looked on aghast. "Oh, don't be afraid! I'm all right. It's just my throat." In a few moments she controlled herself. "There!" she said angrily. "Don't be afraid I sha'n't be able to put on your old play." She offered her hand, still angry, apparently with me, but really with herself, and I hurried away.

The next day I read the play to a group of overdressed, supercilious eccentrics, who at first treated me as if I were an amusing specimen brought in to entertain them. Their opposition caused the perspiration to break out on my forehead. Slowly, however, I could feel their interest grow, and when I had finished the third act, they were listening intently. At the close, one of them exclaimed to another under his breath, but loud enough for me to overhear: "It'll never go in New York. They won't stand for *her* in it."

Holbrook rose from his seat beside Lily Valentine. From time to time I had seen him whisper to her. "We'll give out the parts to-night," he announced, and the actors dispersed into the wings.

"They were dead against it," said the actress, walking towards me and smiling. "They thought it was just one of my enthusiasms."

"Now, look here, Lily," said Holbrook in a loud voice. "New York for this! We don't want to try any experiments in Jaytown, and we need all the time we can get for rehearsing."

"All right, sonny," Lily Valentine replied, evidently pleased that he was willing to do the play at all. Then she cried out, snapping her fingers in my face: "But you'll have to come along with us just the same."

CHAPTER XXVI

LILY VALENTINE HAS TROUBLES

DURING the next week all things not associated with the play seemed to recede into the background. I virtually lived in the theatre, where I continually marvelled at Lily Valentine's incessant activity. She devised stage-business not only for herself but for the other actors; she suggested new lines; she even thought of a new and elaborate scene which I wrote in Holbrook's office.

I was aware that Alice was in active communication with Society; but for me Society had assumed a merely shadowy existence. Letty Henderson was to be married on the Thursday following our first night in New York; the association of this fact with my selfish interests impressed it on my mind. I even heard without emotion or resentment that Alice was to have another new frock. On Thursday Alice temporarily startled me into a most active consciousness of my surroundings by announcing that she was to go to Mrs. Van Zandt on Sunday afternoon.

"Then you are n't coming with me!"

"On one-night stands? I should simply be in the way, Ned."

I pondered the matter and acknowledged that she was right. So, on Sunday at three o'clock I saw

her depart for Tuxedo with Mrs. Van Zandt, who had come to town the day before. An hour later, I was in the stateroom of the car that was carrying Lily Valentine and her company to Dayton, Ohio.

"Well, how do you like it so far?" the actress asked.

"I feel a little dazed," I replied, and she exclaimed, apparently not hearing me: "I thought we'd better go over the first act on the train. No! I'll tell them to study and be letter-perfect in the morning. I suppose I ought to go to bed early. I did n't go to bed at all last night. I never do the night before I leave New York."

That week on the road! Shall I ever forget it? Rehearsals in strange theatres! Wretched nights in berths, with nightmares of steam whistles, shunting of trains, wild rattlings, in a shower of dust and grime. In the morning I used to wake up feeling a hundred years old. An hour later I would meet Lily Valentine, looking fresh and sweet and girlish, her eyes shining, her cheeks like the rose, her whole appearance belying the fearful cough that would suddenly rack her from head to foot.

As a rule, we travelled in a special car, Miss Valentine with her maid occupying the stateroom and rarely stirring from it. At the hotels she invariably found reserved for her by the advance-man the finest *suite* to be secured. But, even with these advantages, her life was lonely. At times I pitied her. When she was not acting, she would sink into profound dejection. "I have to keep busy," she exclaimed to me one day on a train. "If I did n't I

should die." Wherever she went, hands were stretched out for "tips," and she "tipped" most extravagantly. "What's money for," she would often say, "if not to spend?" On Saturday night, after two performances, we stood together on the platform of a railway station, and I noticed that her face looked white and drawn. "I suppose the old Fairy Godmother will pounce down on me to-morrow morning. I must sleep to-night and look fresh."

"Who's the old Fairy Godmother?" I asked.

"Mrs. Smith, of course. I should n't wonder if she'd be at the station."

The next day we found her there, talking with Alice. Mrs. Smith explained that they had come up together from Tuxedo the night before. As I was greeting Alice, I heard Mrs. Smith utter an exclamation of horror. "Lily, you're a sight. You must come straight home with me and get some rest."

"Oh, I can't, Auntie," the actress pouted. "I have a thousand things to attend to. I'm too excited to rest. I'm going home and play the piano till the dress-rehearsal begins. That's the only thing that soothes me."

Mrs. Smith turned to Alice and me with a look of despair on her face. "Well, I'm going home with you, then," she declared.

"All right, come along."

As Alice and I rode home in a cab, we exchanged reminiscences. Alice had enjoyed being with Mrs. Van Zandt, in spite of the weary succession of dinners and luncheons. "All they do at the Van Zandts' is eat and play Bridge. Letty came down with Teddy

and Monty for two days, and it was nice to have Letty. They seem very happy together," she concluded.

"The three?" I asked.

"Oh, Monty did n't count," she replied indifferently. "No one pays any attention to him. Do you know, he's dependent on a sort of grand-aunt who gives him an allowance? His father had a failure years ago, and he has n't any money."

"To think that we should have wasted our precious time on him!" I cried with indignation.

"Oh, if you don't want to hear the rest!" said Alice; and with difficulty I persuaded her to go on.

"Well, Mrs. Eustace has been at the Van Zandts' too. She came on Thursday, and I left her there."

"Then she's abandoned Dick Ferris?"

"Not at all. He was at the Club. Everybody in Tuxedo thinks they're engaged."

"The idiot!"

"Which?"

"Oh, they're both idiots. They're no more suited to each other!"

"They're all sorry for her. They think she must be crazy. Of course they like Ferris—he amuses them so. But the idea of any one's *marrying* him—that's too much for them. And, by the way, Mr. Cosgrave——"

"Has he been there?" I gasped.

"No. But he's sent me a note saying he wanted me to bring you to-day to see the portrait before he exhibits it next week. He's going to have an exhibit in his studio of his portraits of women. He's just sent out the cards."

"M'm! Well, we'll go on our way to the rehearsal," I said grimly, and for a long time we rattled on without speaking. "How's Mary?"

"Everything is all right. Mary has been living on tea and toast ever since we left, and she looks ten years younger."

On seeing Mary, I found justification for Alice's words. Her elephantine figure was clad in a freshly ironed calico gown, and her grotesque Irish face glowed with health and good humour. She received us with maternal affection and insisted that we should sit down at once and eat. On me she turned an amused and knowing eye. I suspected that Alice had been telling her about the play.

"I've got me seat all bought!" she suddenly broke out.

"What seat?" I asked.

"Fer the theayter," said Mary, and she went off into a spasm of laughter. "I'm goin' with me cousin from Weehawken. Me cousin always goes to see Lily Valentine. She think's she's lovely. An' she has a shwate face. That's true enough."

When Mary left the room Alice said: "Is n't it wonderful how the theatre appeals to every one? Now, Mary would never think of reading one of your novels, Ned."

"Why did n't I think to have some seats reserved for her?" I said.

"Oh, well, you can let her go again some time. I suppose they'll keep it on a week, *anyway*."

In the afternoon Alice and I walked up to Cosgrave's studio. The painter was alone and greeted

us with a kind of apprehensive effusiveness. It was a big, barn-like place, filled with faded tapestries and incongruous furniture and dingy hangings. In a perch close to the skylight I perceived the painter's couch, covered with green cloth. It was typical of a certain phase of New York Bohemia that had always made me feel a little sick. On easels, and piled up on the floor and along the walls, were canvases, some in gilt and in black frames, some unframed. My eye rested on Alice's portrait which had a conspicuous place on one of the easels and in a beautifully carved frame, and it was held there, astonished and delighted. I had unconsciously formed the opinion that Cosgrave was a mere dilettante; but there was Alice to the life, in a pose so true, so characteristic, that I marvelled at the skill that had caught and reproduced it. In the face, too, was the expression of artlessness combined with humour that I loved in Alice, the curious, quizzical expression.

Alice saw that I was impressed, and she laughed and clapped her hands.

"I have n't told him how good it was!" she said to Cosgrave. "I wanted him to find out for himself."

"It's the best thing I've done," he said in a low voice; and in my delight I turned and said:

"Well, when I get rich, I shall buy that from you."

"I'm not so sure I shall want to sell," he replied.

"Now if the play is a success you must let us buy it," cried Alice. "Oh, Ned, you must send Mr. Cosgrave seats for to-morrow night."

"I will if I can get them," I replied, and Cosgrave, without speaking, made a low bow.

We looked at the other portraits, all clever, but most of them superficially or insincerely treated. My eye wandered in vain for the portrait of Mrs. Eustace. As we were about to leave, however, Cosgrave changed the position of one of the canvases and suddenly revealed a portrait as startling in a different way as Alice's had been. As if to emphasize the contrast, he placed the portraits together, and he looked at them both with a sardonic smile. It was Mrs. Eustace as I had first seen her that night at the Van Zandts'; in the same gown, with the expression of bravado in her face, emphasized into scorn and contempt, and with a look in the eyes of sensuality and malice.

When we reached the street, I said: "If I were Mrs. Eustace's husband or brother, I think I'd be tempted to murder Cosgrave."

"I wonder if he'll dare to exhibit it," said Alice; and we let the subject drop.

"Now what have you done about to-morrow night?" I asked. "Is it all arranged?"

"Yes, and it's so splendid. The Van Zandts and Letty and Teddy and, of course, Monty, will sit in the box with us, and then after the performance we must take them out to supper. That will pay off our obligations beautifully. And we must ask Lily Valentine too. And, I suppose," Alice dubiously concluded, "we must ask Mr. Holbrook, too, though somehow I don't care much about him."

"Yes, we must have Holbrook," I said feverishly. "If the piece is a frost, what a ghastly supper-party we will be!"

That night Alice and I had an early dinner and by seven o'clock we were in the theatre. In the dimly lighted lobby we met Mrs. Smith.

"Well, I made Lily go to sleep this afternoon," she said. "But that Jackanapes Holbrook came at five o'clock, and something he said to her has upset her. Here, dear!" She clutched my arm. "You go round to the dressing-room and see if you can't cheer her up. Your wife and I will sit at the back of the theatre."

I walked down the dark passage leading to the wings. I could catch glimpses of small groups of people in the orchestra. On the stage wild confusion prevailed. An electrician directed me to the star's dressing-room, and I knocked on the door. Lily Valentine was there alone, weeping bitterly.

"Why, Miss Valentine!"

She held out her hand. "Shut the door and come in. What do you think? This afternoon, just as I was feeling fit and keen to start the rehearsal, in came Holbrook and actually had the nerve to ask me to marry him. What do you think of that?"

"Well—" I hesitated. It was a hard question to answer. "I agree with you that the proposal was untimely."

"Untimely!" Miss Valentine became so indignant that her grief found temporary relief. "It was impertinent of him. Besides, as I told him, it's in my contract that I'm not to marry any one till the contract has expired, and that won't be for three years yet. You see, he's afraid I'll make a big hit tomorrow and be tempted to break from him and go

with some other manager. Did you ever hear of such a thing? But it's a compliment to you."

"To the play, you mean," I said.

"Of course, I meant to the play. What else do you suppose I meant?"

Having delivered this squelcher, Lily Valentine began to cry again.

"I don't see why you should take it so hard, Miss Valentine."

"It's because I'm nervous, I suppose." She leaped from her seat in front of the mirror. "I must stop smoking cigarettes," she exclaimed. She ran her hand across her forehead with the pretty gesture she often used on the stage. "He's sure the piece will be a 'go,' and he knows what they want out there. That's something, is n't it? But what worried him was my getting you to do it and having a finger in the pie. Of course," she added, swiftly reverting to her business-tone, "he does n't get so much out of it now as he did. He hates to see me growing more independent of him. He'd begun to think that he owned me."

At this moment, Holbrook entered, looking debonair and handsome, as usual. On seeing the actress, he started back in genuine alarm. "What's the matter, Lily?"

"Oh, nothing." She turned away like a petulant child. Then she faced him in a fury. "Don't you know I always get like this before a first night?"

He burst into a loud peal of laughter, and, without a word, he shot out of the room. Miss Valentine dropped into her seat again and her manner once more became utterly listless.

"What a silly person!" she said.

I glanced into the corridor where people were passing and re-passing in apparently endless procession.

"I think I'd better get out of the way and let you dress."

I closed the door behind me and left the actress. For a half-hour she kept us waiting. I sat at the back with Alice and Mrs. Smith. The groups of people I had noticed, consisted chiefly of Lily Valentine's friends, most of them actresses. At last the curtain went up and the rehearsal proceeded. All of the actors were on their mettle, and played with spirit; but at the end of each act Miss Valentine expressed dissatisfaction. Two of the acts she insisted on being repeated. It was twelve o'clock when the rehearsal was finished, and one o'clock when Alice and I reached home.

CHAPTER XXVII

SOME FIRST-NIGHT AGITATIONS

WE were so tired that at ten the next morning, when the bell rang, we warned Mary to say we were not at home; but the voice of Letty Henderson caused Alice to step into the hall and confess the deception. The girl was very pale and she sank into a seat in the hall.

"I did n't think that you'd be here," she said, looking up at me.

"Oh, if I'm in the way!" I said.

"No, I'm really glad you're here, though it's selfish of me. Something has happened."

"What?" Alice and I exclaimed in a breath.

Letty Henderson held up a little parcel that she carried in her hand. "This came this morning by special messenger. It's some letters." Her voice choked.

Alice and I stood waiting.

"They're some letters that Miss Cartwright, that awful girl—well, they're letters that Teddy wrote to her. I don't know what to do. I've read them—every one. They make me—they make me want to—never to see Teddy again. And then, the last one, the one his lawyer sent to her, offering money, that was terrible too. I suppose she did it for revenge."

"I'm sorry, dear," said Alice.

"Monty knew. He might have told me," the girl went on with quiet and helpless lamentation. "So many people must have known. My father and my mother—they must. Mother knows everything—everything horrid, I mean," the girl concluded bitterly, and she burst into tears.

"Come, dear," said Alice. "Come with me." She drew Letty into the bedroom and closed the door. A half-hour later she emerged, her eyes swollen.

"What *can* we do?" she said; and I was ready with my reply.

"We can do nothing. She's in a mess, and she must get out of it herself."

"Then you think she ought to get out of it. She came here to us for advice."

"But I don't advise. I don't advise. Now, my dear, you must not take on yourself——"

"I know, Ned. But I must say something."

"Well, tell her to take time and think it over. That's always safe."

"That's exactly what I've done!" Alice cried in triumph.

"Well, did it do any good?"

"Any sympathy would do her good. Besides, she came here to get away from that old mother of hers, as much as anything else."

"To find a sympathetic shoulder to cry on."

"Oh, Ned, don't be brutal!"

"She won't come to our box-party, now," I said ruefully.

"Well, I had n't thought about that. I don't believe I'll mention it, anyway."

"She has a sort of interest in the play, you know."

"Why, of course," Alice cried with delight. "Perhaps it would rouse her to come."

"I've got to go to the theatre now, anyway. Tell her I'm sorry, and all that, won't you?"

I left the house, selfishly glad to escape, and meanly resentful of the emotional excitement that Alice was getting from the situation. In the theatre I found Lily Valentine scolding the property-man. For an hour we experimented with the lighting, and discussed some new bits of stage-business. Suddenly a voice from the back of the theatre startled us.

"Hello, Lily!"

The soft, feminine quality at once told me that the dim figure was Walter Hart.

"Oh, you mean thing! Why were n't you in front last night?"

Hart came down the steep aisle. In his hand he carried what looked like a magazine. "Because you did n't invite me."

"You said you were going to help us out, and you have n't been near us."

"Oh, Lily, if you really wanted me you'd have sent an invitation over the 'phone. Trust you for that. Anyway, I thought you'd be rehearsing this morning."

"Well, we've rehearsed all we intend to rehearse. Besides, we can get along without you."

Hart appealed to me. "Is n't she the little spit-fire? Lily," he went on, "I would n't marry you if I were to be paid a million dollars a week."

"Well, you won't get the chance."

"Think of having to face Lily every morning at breakfast. Ugh!" Walter Hart had one of his shivers.

"Still, Wallie,"—the actress reassumed her arch manner,—“you're the only man I ever really loved.” She raised her finger and shook it meaningly. “He's the only man I've ever made love to. Honest! He's the only man that can resist me.”

“And that's why she's shelving my play. It's pique,—just pique. It's a good thing you're married, Mr. Foster.”

Lily Valentine beamed down across the footlights. “Are you going to be in front to-night, Wallie?”

“Of course I am. I intend to *boo* as they do in England. I hope you'll have a frost. Then you'll have to go back to my piece.” He threw back his shoulders and folded his arms. “Oh, I can see you crawling on your hands and knees and begging me to write another play for you.”

Lily Valentine raised her hand with a threatening gesture. “When I crawl to *you*! It's you who'll crawl to me some day.”

“Listen to her, will you? She's going to be an actress-manager. So that's the game, hey?”

“Oh, you're hopeless, Walter.”

“Say,” Hart called up, “there's something in this paper that will interest you two people—you society-trucklers.” He threw on the stage the periodical he had been holding in his hand, and I picked it up.

“Look at that paragraph on the first page.”

Miss Valentine and I walked to the single light

that dissipated the darkness on the stage, and I looked over her shoulder and read:

“Why is it that so many bounders and blackguards are tolerated in New York? Why is it that because a man can set up a studio in the slums and fill it with second-hand trappings, he can persuade a lot of silly women to run after him and proclaim him a genius? Has society become so dull that people must be amused at any cost? One woman, well known in New York and fresh from an experience in the divorce court that ought to have taught her a little discretion, has lately been paying dear for her folly. Everybody has been laughing at her infatuation for an impecunious artist of upper Bohemia, and, lately, amusement has turned to wonder at her sudden cure. The explanation comes by way of a pawnbroker’s shop in the Bowery where many members of the fashionable world habitually resort. It appears that the lady sat to her artist-friend for a portrait, wearing her celebrated necklace of diamonds. One day she left the diamonds in the studio, and to secure them again she had to go in person to the Bowery pawnbroker, who let her have them back for a trifle of a few hundred dollars. Now that she has lost interest in her artist-friend, she has taken up with a popular exile from Erin’s Isle who a few years ago rode into society behind a pack of hounds. It is intimated that she actually intends to marry him. Meanwhile her ex-husband is about to console himself in a union with the daughter of one of Long Island’s richest residents.”

Lily Valentine pushed the paper away from her.

"Walter, I see where you get your next play. But there's no part for me in it."

"Always an *ingénue*, Lily," Hart retorted, and he started up the aisle. "You can keep the paper," he called out over his shoulder."

It was nearly three o'clock when Lily Valentine and I finally left the theatre. We had been too busy even to think of eating.

"You'll take a rest, I suppose?" I said, as I put Miss Valentine into a hansom.

"I shall go straight home and play the piano all the afternoon," she replied.

When I reached the apartment, Alice met me in the hall.

"It was nice and thoughtful of you to stay away, Ned. Letty has just gone."

I was too tired to refuse the compliment.

"I persuaded her to tell her mother everything."

Here I laughed aloud. "Her mother's known it all along."

"She does n't know everything," Alice mysteriously commented.

"Now about to-night?" I said; and Alice, seeing that I was on the point of working myself into a fever, cut me short.

"Everything is most beautifully arranged, Ned. Not a detail has been forgotten. I've even asked Mrs. Smith to join us after the performance."

Mary went about the house all the afternoon with an air of defiant humour. On several occasions I had a savage impulse to hit her. At dinner she revelled in finery that might have made the fortune of a comic

actress. Her appearance put me in better temper, and by the time we reached the theatre I was in a state of calm that filled me with astonishment. Letty Henderson came early with Teddy and Monty, and the Van Zandts arrived just as the curtain rang up. In the opposite stage-box were Mrs. Smith with Mrs. Eustace and Dick Ferris, and two young girls whom I did not recognise. In the audience, which I covertly studied, I saw Cosgrave, using the second of his two seats for his overcoat.

Of the details of the performance, I literally have no recollection. I only know that the whole evening seemed like an illusion. It was Lily Valentine's night; when the star was not on the stage the interest flagged, and I was remotely aware that I was congratulating myself on having kept her in the centre nearly all the time. Between the acts people came and went; but they were all unreal.

At the close, the audience called the actress out again and again, and I remember that for a few minutes I stood in a blinding light. There were horrible cries for a speech; but I could n't have spoken a word if my life depended on it. Then there was darkness again, and queer painted faces laughing around me, and then the high voice of Walter Hart saying: "Lily, if I had supposed that you'd ever learn to act like that, I'd have married you long ago."

"Well, why don't you do it now? I dare you."

Then I saw Hart go forward and kiss her painted lips, and everybody laughed, and I came to my senses.

Lily Valentine grew white beneath her make-up. She sank into a chair. We all thought she was going to collapse; but she soon recovered. "She'll simply kill herself," said Mrs. Smith to me. "Now let me take her home. I refuse to allow her to go out to supper. I'll get Holbrook to drive us both down to my house."

In the lobby we met Mrs. Eustace and Ferris. They walked on with us, when suddenly we came face to face with Cosgrave. For an instant the painter hesitated; then he came forward to speak to Alice. Ferris must have misunderstood the movement; he grew livid with rage, and, making a leap in the air, he struck Cosgrave with his clenched fist full in the mouth. As the two men were about to grapple, a tall, athletic figure rushed between them, and I recognised "Fritz" Eustace.

"You damn fools!" he said. "Do you want to disgrace these women?"

Mrs. Eustace looked as if she were about to faint. "Get Dick Ferris out of the way!" she gasped.

Cosgrave rapidly made his way through the crowd; but Ferris, white with wrath, did not stir.

"I'll give him what he deserves, the blackguard!" he muttered in his richest brogue.

"For God's sake, let us get out of this!" Mrs. Eustace cried.

The incident had occurred so quickly that the people about us had hardly grasped its significance. When we reached the street, a small crowd gathered around us. Mrs. Eustace, who was clinging to the arm of her former husband, turned angrily to Ferris.

"Now I'm going straight home," she said, "and I hope I shall never see you again, Dick Ferris. You are a brute and a jackass. You've made a public spectacle of me. Don't you ever come near me. Fritz, get a cab as quick as you can."

Eustace called a hansom, and the pair were soon out of our sight.

"Well, if that is n't the *limit*," said Monty.

At the moment, I felt sorry for Ferris. He acted as a man does who feels that every one is against him. Mrs. Eustace's words had brought him to his senses. He turned to Alice and Letty and began to make effusive apologies. I had never heard his tongue so thick.

"It seems to me the best thing for us to do is to go home," said Teddy; and I inwardly applauded his good sense.

"Well, I don't see why those idiots need spoil our supper," Monty protested.

"Oh, do let us go home!" Letty pleaded, and she appealed to Alice and me. "You'll forgive us, won't you?"

Teddy looked bored and disgusted. "I tell you what I'll do," he said. "I'll drive the Fosters home in my carriage and Monty can take Letty home in the other carriage."

Letty looked frightened; but she did not speak.

"That's perfectly satisfactory to me," said Monty, and a quarter of an hour later Alice and I were at home again. Mary had not arrived, and the place was in darkness. When we had lighted up and removed our wraps, we looked at each other and laughed. I seized Alice by both hands.

"We're going to have the place in the country!" I cried; and throwing her arms around my neck Alice exclaimed:

"Oh, Ned, it was worth our while to play with Society, was n't it?"

Mary presently came in, nearly beside herself with rapture over the night's experience, and with quotations from her neighbours in the gallery. She found us something to eat and waited on me as if I were the descendant of an Irish king. At last I had won her **respect!**

CHAPTER XXVIII

A FEW SOLUTIONS

IN the morning I found that the papers did not roast the play; they merely sneered at it and said that it was plainly written to exploit a personality popular at the moment, and, as such, served its purpose. It was a hard blow, but Alice and I decided that it would not seriously damage our country place. Then we looked for some reference to the trouble between Ferris and Cosgrave; but it had escaped mention.

"That scandalous weekly will have it," said Alice, and I added: "Yes, with a few scandalous inaccuracies thrown in."

While we were still at breakfast, counting up our future royalties and planning to begin our search for the house that very day, the bell rang and we heard whisperings in the outer hall. Then Letty burst in, with Monty following close behind. Something in their appearance startled me.

"Congratulate us!" Monty shouted at the top of his voice, and Letty blushed furiously.

"We're married!" Monty went on, still at the top of his voice.

Alice and I were speechless. We both rose from our seats.

"Well, are n't you going to congratulate us?"

"When did it happen?" asked Alice, still holding off.

"This morning." Monty seemed to be bursting with happiness. "We arranged everything on the way home last night. Hurrah for Dick Ferris for giving us a chance to be alone together! We stole away early and went over to Jersey. We have n't had our wedding breakfast yet. Are n't you going to invite us to eat something?"

Then Alice melted and the two girls hugged each other. I offered my hand to each of them. I'm afraid my manner was cold.

"Do you know," Letty confided to me, "it was your example that did it—seeing you so happy together in your simple lives?"

"Oh, but we're not going to be simple any more. We're rich. Think of our play."

Letty laughed patiently and went on. "Monty's going into the insurance business, and we're going to have a little flat like this one. Would n't it be lovely if we could be in the same house together?"

"Oh, would n't it!" I echoed, and something in my tone must have alarmed Alice.

"Perhaps you can get this apartment, dear, after we leave. We intend to live in the country."

Letty looked disappointed—but for a moment only. "We're going South for a few weeks," she explained. "That is, we'll ask Mrs. Van Zandt to take us in at Tuxedo for a little while until my father and mother are reconciled to our marriage."

"And if they don't give us their blessing," Monty added loftily, "why, we can get on without it."

Mary, indignant at the intrusion of the bride and groom, and betraying by her manner that she disapproved of their doings, brought on some more bacon and eggs.

They stayed a long time, evidently because they did not know where else to go, and because they dreaded future events. When, finally, they left, Alice and I went back to the breakfast-room. I waited for Alice to make the first remark.

"Poor Mrs. Henderson!" she said.

"Do you think those two will be happy?"

"She's cared for him all along," said Alice. "I've suspected it from the first."

"Oh!" I exclaimed.

"From that first dinner at the Van Zandts'," Alice reiterated. "If I did n't say so at the time, it was because I knew you'd laugh."

The play has been running for more than a year, and the check for royalites comes in every week, with a beautiful regularity. We have our little place in Westchester, and we are glad we moved, for we shall soon need more room. Since settling in the country, when I grow tired of working on plays and on that old novel that is not done yet and that I sometimes fear never will be done, I have amused myself by writing these reminiscences of a few rather unusual months in our lives. I kept them out of Alice's sight till I approached the end. Then I let her read them. With some apprehension I listened to her verdict.

"It's the most *imaginative* thing you've ever done, Ned." There was a hint of sarcasm in Alice's tone.

"Why?" I asked nervously.

"Well, in your treatment of the characters. Me, for instance. Alice is so different from what I really am."

"Of course," I hastily acknowledged. "I intended——"

"She's so much cleverer!"

"Ah!"

"In her own opinion."

Silence followed.

"And so much more subtle. You've read into my mind all sorts of notions and motives that never existed there. And poor Lily Valentine! Did she really talk to you in that intimate way? She must have been in love with you, or you must have thought so."

"I never thought so!" I indignantly exclaimed.

"You ought to have mentioned about Mrs. Eustace's marriage."

"Her re-marriage, you mean. It is n't romantic enough."

"Perhaps not. It's so common. You read about that sort of thing all the time in the newspapers. Even when married people hate each other and torment each other, there seems to be some sort of tie between them. You might have made something psychological about that. Of course, those two can't ever be happy."

"I don't know why they can't. Sometimes, as

people grow older they profit by their mistakes and get a little sense."

Alice ignored my argument.

"And Cosgrave's leaving New York and going over to London and making a big hit, and having my portrait exhibited over there and reproduced in the magazines."

"Well, you know I don't care so much about that. Besides, it is n't quite moral to allow people like Cosgrave to have any luck in literature."

"They often have it in life, though," Alice went on. "But oh! don't forget about Letty's baby, the dear little baby that has made her mother soften toward her."

"But people are n't interested in babies, Alice."

"Are n't they!" Alice exclaimed, and I held her hand tightly to show that I did not mean what I said.

"We'd better not say much about that inflated curmudgeon of a father," I resumed.

Alice's face clouded.

"He seems to keep up just the same," I remarked.

"That's the tragedy of it, Ned. If they would give up the struggle it would n't be nearly so distressing. How do they manage?"

"How do thousands just like them manage?" I echoed.

"And then calling the story *Our Best Society*. I don't like the title."

"That's because, dear, you have n't stopped to think what it means."

"What does it mean?"

I drew her toward me and kissed her. "Can't you guess?"

For a long time we sat close together. "It 's our own society, Ned."

"Of course!" I exclaimed.

*A Selection from the
Catalogue of*
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS



**Complete Catalogues sent
on application**

WHAT THE CRITICS THINK OF MYRTLE REED'S BOOKS

Love Letters of a Musician

Later Love Letters of a Musician

The Spinster Book

Lavender and Old Lace

The Master's Violin

At the Sign of the Jack-o'-Lantern

The above volumes are printed throughout in red and black and are charmingly bound, in a gilt top, crown octavo volume.

Cloth. (Postage, 15 cts.).	Each	-	net, \$1.50
Red leather, in a box.	"	-	" 2.00
Antique calf, in a box.	"	-	" 2.50
Lavender silk, in a box.	"	-	" 3.50

The Shadow of Victory

A Romance of Fort Dearborn.

With frontispiece.

Crown octavo. (Postage, 15 cts.)	-	net, \$1.20
Red leather, in a box	- - -	" 2.00

"Miss Reed is delightfully witty, delightfully humorous, delightfully cynical, delightfully sane, and above all, delightfully spontaneous. Her pages sparkle with bright clear wit, they bubble with honest, hearty humor, they contain many stings but no savage thrusts."—*Philadelphia Telegraph*.

"Myrtle Reed has certainly an instinct for the exquisite phrase, a delicate touch for an allegory, a capacity for using words somewhat after the fashion of notes in music, to weave together into a melody."—*Milwaukee Sentinel*.

Send for illustrated descriptive circular.

New York—G. P. Putnam's Sons—London

GOOD FICTION

The Prince Chap

A Story in Three Curtains and Several Scenes

By EDWARD PEPLE, author of "A Broken Rosary," etc.

12°. Net, \$1.20. (By mail, \$1.35.)

"The Prince Chap" is a winsome love story, the scene being laid in a London Art Colony, and the hero an American sculptor. The book contains humor, pathos, and sentiment, mingled in just the proper proportion to make it delightful reading.

The Ragged Messenger

By W. B. MAXWELL.

12°. Net, \$1.20. (By mail, \$1.35.)

"This is a remarkable novel—one of the most remarkable of recent years. Mr. Maxwell has imagination; he has a keen eye for human emotion, for the pathos of life and the comedy. And with it all a sense of proportion and the power of arrangement, which have enabled him to produce a four-square and powerful piece of work. . . . It is a strong book and a fine book."—*St. James Gazette*.

Green Mansions

A Romance of the Tropical Forest

By W. H. HUDSON.

12°. Net, \$1.20. (By mail, \$1.35.)

"A fine piece of work, purely romantic, and, although written in very sound prose, purely poetic. The descriptions of forest and scenery are exquisite, and no less exquisite are the passages which describe the half-supernatural heroine, whose pursuit forms a wonderful idyl of savage life. A book that should on no account be missed by those who appreciate what is rare and fine in fiction."—*Athenæum*.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

NEW YORK

LONDON

EMMA EAMES *writes:*

"*Belchamber* is not only one of the strongest books I have read in years, but is so beautifully written. It made an amazing impression on me and haunted me for days. One of the ladies of London society told me she considered it a marvellously true picture of a certain set."

BELCHAMBER

By HOWARD OVERING STURGIS

Author of "All That Was Possible," etc.

12mo

\$1.50

A TRUTHFUL and particularly engaging novel of very fashionable English society. There is a picturesque and attractive background to the story in the fine old country estate and luxurious town house of the Marquis of Belchamber. The people of the book are real personalities; and in striking contrast to the mere action and incident of present-day fiction, they change and develop among the influences and circumstances which surround them. *Belchamber* is essentially a novel of character, giving with delicate perception and psychological force the varying attitudes towards life of different natures. Here is "Sainty," the frail and shy boy who becomes Marquis of Belchamber; his stern Scotch mother; Lord Arthur, the handsome, lovable, spendthrift younger brother; and all the others, gay and sad, who together make a veritable new *Vanity Fair*.

NEW YORK—G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS—LONDON

A Stirring and Captivating Story

THE GIRL OF LA GLORIA

By

CLARA DRISCOLL

With Illustrations in Color by
HUGH DITZLER

12mo. \$1.50

A charming love-story of Texas. The heroine, Ilaria, is the last of an old Mexican family, who have gradually been dispossessed of all their lands by the grasping Americanos. A young man from New York falls in love with this beautiful descendant of the early Spanish conquerors. There are fascinating descriptions of the rough, romantic life of the plains, when men were quick with their love and quicker with their hate. The story moves rapidly, with strong, thrilling scenes, and the reader's interest is held to the dramatic close.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

NEW YORK

LONDON

OCT 5 1905

COPY DEL. TO CAT. DIV.

OCT 5 1905

OCT 12 1905

